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A STUDY OF METRE

A STUDY OF METRE

BY

T. S. OMOND

"The ear is a rational sense, and a chief judge of proportion."—THOS. CAMPION.

"A dunce like myself measures verse . . . by ear and not by finger."—A. C. SWINBURNE.

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To all lovers of English Poetry

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INTRODUCTORY

MODERN English prosody dates from Coleridge's dictum, in the preface to "Christabel" (1816), that not the syllables but the accents of his lines were to be reckoned. This remark of a great master cannot have been intended to give a complete theory. It says nothing about the arrangement of these accents, which is at least as vital as the fact of their occurrence. Probably he assumed their order of succession as obvious. This order, however, has been ignored by very many of his successors, who speak as if mere casual recurrence of accents sufficed to constitute verse. Thus, for example, our ordinary "heroic" line[1] is often said to be a line carrying *five stresses*, as though that were in itself distinctive. But the same description applies to many a prose sentence. Prosody is bound to furnish a criterion distinguishing verse from prose. Coleridge's "new principle," as he

[1] This name belongs to the best-known of all our lines, containing normally ten syllables, used by Shakespeare in his plays, Milton in "Paradise Lost," Pope in his Essays and Satires. It may be rhymed or rhymeless, in blank verse, couplet, or stanza.

called it—new to the critics of his day, but old as English poetry in meaning and application—gives a starting-point to those seeking such criterion. It indicates the path, which his pupils must follow for themselves.

A step forward was taken when Coventry Patmore, in the essay appended to his Poems, proclaimed that the accents must be separated by "isochronous intervals." This pronouncement brought him into line with our musical scansionists, to all of whom Joshua Steele ("Prosodia Rationalis," 1775) may be accounted father. Scansion by musical notation has not found much favour in this country, though Ruskin made use of it in his "Elements of English Prosody" (1880), representing the units of verse—termed by him "metres"—under the guise of minims and crochets. In America it seems to have made more way. Sidney Lanier developed it systematically in "The Science of English Verse" (Boston, 1880), a book which has received strangely little attention on this side the Atlantic. Other independent workers have pursued the subject since. One of the latest, Miss J. P. Dabney ("The Musical Basis of Verse," New York and London, 1901), follows Lanier in general conception while criticising him in details, and seems almost to think that her leader invented the whole idea of musical scansion.

These writers naturally emphasize the idea of *time*. By the majority of our grammarians, on the other hand, it is completely ignored. While theoretically admitting time as an element in all

verse, they practically leave it out of their account. Ordinary manuals of prosody never mention it, and usually state that accent is the foundation of our verse. Lists of so-called "feet" are given, yet the one element which can really create "feet" is passed by without mention. The facts under review are not adequately explained by these statements. Verse-structure must exist before it can be signalized by accent. A more thoroughgoing inquiry is needed, which will resolve our verse into its actual constituents, and assign to each its station and degree. Accent is pretty obviously one of these, but it is almost as obviously not the sole one. Accurate analysis of English verse should leave no possible factor unnoticed.

Scientific study of our verse-forms, indeed, has not been neglected. Both in England and America, during the last thirty years especially, much very valuable analysis has been made of phenomena and their grouping. But it is contained in treatises written by scholars for scholars, concerned more with points of detail than with general laws. Metrical effect depends on certain broad principles, simple in conception (for a child can enjoy verse), yet capable of endless elaboration and development at the hands of accomplished singers. In considering the latter aspect we have, perhaps, somewhat lost sight of the former. No building is secure without a good foundation. The most complex, and refined, and specialized theories of verse-structure stand or fall by compliance with certain plain, elementary, fundamental truths. A

clear statement of these last is indispensable to any real understanding of the conditions which shape English verse.

In the following study, time is taken as the basis of our verse, but music and metre are not regarded as synonymous. Measurements are held to depend on time-periods rather than syllables, while the function of accent becomes mainly directive and illuminative. An attempt is made to analyze the nature and construction of our metrical unit. The appeal throughout is to readers of English poetry, technical questions are sparingly dealt with, and acquaintance with other languages is not presumed. It were strange if the principles of English verse could not be comprehended without reference to foreign literature, ancient or modern. Indeed, it seems doubtful whether we fully appreciate the verse-rhythm of any but our native language, or one closely akin to it. Not that study of other prosodies, Classical in particular, can be held of small value. It is inestimably important in matters metrical. But even knowledge of the Classics is no substitute for knowledge of English. More harm than good seems to have been done by critics whose single idea was to compare our verse with that of the old Greeks and Romans, and to interpret our cadences by means of theirs. These Chapters deal with English verse for and by itself, any reference to other literatures being made only by way of illustration.

The elements which blend to form a unit are noted first separately, then in conjunction. While

the argument must be left to unfold itself, it may be premised that the criterion before referred to is found to be indissolubly connected with *time*, and that scansion by time-spaces is contrasted with the crudity and dubiety of scansion by syllables. Results reached on these lines seem to carry their own warrant, and to make English Prosody more real and helpful than it is generally esteemed.

* * * * *

The present volume builds on and supersedes certain essays and magazine articles of a mainly tentative character published from five to six years ago. These received a welcome which encouraged me to attempt a more systematic handling of the whole subject, in doing which—not without interruption from other work—I have revised and restated my own views as well as paid attention to those of others.

A sarcastic letter sent by Swinburne to the "Academy" of January 15th, 1876, some words from which appear on my title-page, contains the following pronouncement. "Of word-music, the technical quality of metre, the executive secret and inner method of the poetic art, it is admittedly for scholiasts alone to judge; and their teaching is undoubtedly not as that of the scribes or poets." The first part of this sentence I accept seriously, save indeed for the word "alone." As regards the second, I trust these pages may show that it is possible for a mere grammarian to expound doctrines according with both the theory and the

practice of poets, and drawing their whole meaning and authority from the latter.

I had hoped to subjoin to this study a short historical and bibliographical sketch of English metrical criticism, providing some halfpennyworth of fact to relieve what may seem an intolerable amount of theorizing. The dimensions to which this soon attained forbade its inclusion, and it is reserved for possible future issue. In its stead will be found an Appendix on hexameter and other forms of would-be Classical metre, consideration of which seemed germane to my subject.

January, 1903.

Beyond trifling verbal corrections, I have made no alteration in this reprint, feeling that a book once issued is the property of the public. Otherwise I should have been glad to expand and explain largely, but without any change of fundamental principles.

T. S. Omond.

14 Calverley Park,
Tunbridge Wells,
July, 1920.

τεκμήριον μέτρου ἀκοή
("Hearing tests metre").
"LONGINUS" ON HEPHAESTION.

Aurem tuam interroga
("Question thy ear").
PROBUS APUD A. GELLIUM.

"Poetry utters words in time."
LESSING, *Laocoon.*

CHAPTER I

THE "PERIOD"—TIME AND PAUSE

METRE is the body of verse, as emotional thought is the soul. Etymologically, metre means simply *measure*. Some writers use it in specialized senses, but it is better to keep it as a term of general connotation. Why do we want to measure verse? For the same reason that we study laws of colour, or laws of musical harmony. In each case we seek to analyze results which have pleased us in the work of poet, painter, or musician. By measuring, by dividing this into its units, we hope to throw light on its architecture. Such knowledge is not necessary to the artist, nor even to its intelligent admirer. It will not make a genius, nor teach us infallibly to detect one; we can but judge of results, not lay down laws for the future. Great poets undoubtedly sing by ear, and their practice is so far a law to itself. Yet it must in every case obey the principles of its art; the highest freedom is conditioned by the law of its being. Metrical science should train us to reject bad verse, and aid us to appreciate good, unless the latter present combinations too novel for an unprepared taste to relish. What, then, are the principles which underlie

English prosody, practised as an art or studied as a science?

All metre is essentially rhythmical. That is to say, it consists of equal units, uniform as regards duration. This is the meaning and definition of the word, by no means always kept in view. Consider any application of rhythm, even to inarticulate objects. The sailor pulling at his ropes, the blacksmith beating on his anvil, the tramp of a marching regiment—all the old familiar illustrations—regularity of recurrence is the principle these show at work. Music and verse both obey this law. The school-boy patching his doggerel, the poet "hidden in the light of thought," equally own its sway. Philosophers have called rhythm the pulse of the universe; the Greeks said that its sire was God. At all events poetry, in common with other arts, is wholly and absolutely conditioned by rhythm; this is the breath and law of its being.

Here, at the outset, we find precisely what differenciates verse from prose. These two possess much in common. Their ideals are often similar; their subjects may be identical; their cadences sometimes coincide. Yet there is an essential difference, which has seldom been rightly stated, and which is a difference of mechanical method. The units of prose are diverse, irregular in length, rarely conformed to a common pattern. In verse, on the other hand, succession is continuous. Something recurs with regularity. This is the distinctive note of verse, making its structure differ from that of prose; no other absolute line of demarcation can

be drawn. Typical recurrence, uniform repetition, is the prime postulate of metre.

Our first inquiry must therefore be: What is it that thus recurs? English grammarians almost unanimously teach that what recurs is a succession of words. Divided into syllables, which are classed according to certain inherent qualities, words are held to form the basis of our metre. Their syllables, denoted now by symbols of long and short, now by characters representing degrees of stress, or yet again by musical notes, are put forward as by themselves constituting verse. I maintain that this view is fundamentally fallacious. It assumes successions which do not exist. Uniformity is claimed where there is patent diversity. The "feet" of our grammars, the algrebraical-looking columns of *a x* and *x a* given in some books of prosody, the rows of crochets and quavers preferred by musical scansionists, all show an imagined regularity not in accordance with fact. Syllables do not succeed each other with anything like the correspondence asserted. This is not denied by our best authorities, who content themselves with treating it as of small importance. Yet it throws doubt on the validity of their whole explanation. Can a different answer be given, not vitiated by this element of inexactness and make-believe, and according better with the real facts?

If syllables do not recur with regularity, we must fall back on that which underlies these—on the time-spaces or periods of duration in which syllables are, as it were, embedded. All verse is conditioned

by time. The term "period" may be conveniently used to denote the unit of time (less intelligibly styled a "foot"), whose constitution we are about to consider. If these periods are of uniform length, regularity of recurrence is secured. It is usually assumed that an English line may consist of unequal units—proportionate, perhaps, in more or less definite ratio, but not fundamentally equal. This, however, would violate our definition of rhythm. If periods constitute rhythm, they must do so by uniform succession. Syllables do not supply this absolute recurrence; their order of succession is changeful, capricious. They need to be contrasted with underlying uniformity. That substratum seems afforded by time. *Isochronous periods* form the units of metre. Syllabic variation gets its whole force from contrast with these, is conceivable only in relation to these. Forgetfulness of this fact leads to false theory and incorrect practice. Unless temporal uniformity underlies syllabic variety, verse ceases to be recognized as verse; and not a few lines in recent poetry seem to exemplify this defect.

Equality of periods cannot be directly demonstrated. The very existence of such divisions, much more their exact length, is matter less for *a priori* dogmatism than for testing by experiment. The reader must verify it by his own ear. Still, if time govern metre—which no critic will deny—there must be units of time, and the very definition of rhythm suggests that these units are equal. For the present this equality shall be assumed as a working hypothesis, and the division of a line into

periods shall be assumed to be patent. As a matter of fact, I imagine, no reader will feel any more difficulty in recognizing that a line of verse consists of successive periods, than in recognizing that a word usually consists of successive sounds. Later on we may see what determines the length of periods; at present it is enough to perceive that they exist.

That syllables do not occur uniformly in periods, again—even as regards their number, much less as regards their character—is equally obvious. Any snatch of verse shows it. Take the child's rhyme:

Pease | pudding | hot,
Pease | pudding | cold.

The periods are pretty obviously as here represented, with a monosyllable in the first, a dissyllable in the second. Or take a slightly more complex structure in "Sing a song of sixpence." There I should say that every line has *seven periods*, each normally carrying two syllables. A line may either have its full tale of syllables, *e.g.*,

Now was | not this | a dain- | ty dish | to set | before | a king?

Or it may have a less number, *e.g.*,

By | came | a black- | bird, | and nipt | off | her nose.

Where we put the division-marks is of little moment. What is needful is to see that these are two lines of the same pattern, the same *metre*, though one contains ten syllables, the other fourteen. How, then, does the second line produce the same

metrical effect as the first? Obviously because the periods in each are identical, though in one case less fully filled up by syllables. Time is thus the real basis of this metre, and syllables are comparatively unimportant; in other words, the periods may be either occupied by sound or left blank (to some extent at least), apparently as the writer wills.

No apology need be made for choosing these examples. The ruder the structure, the better for our purpose. We want to see the raw beginnings, the original framework of metre; flesh and colouring can come later. Identical laws must govern all verse, from the simplest to the most complicated. It is, perhaps, too common a mistake to plunge at once into the depths of metrical analysis without first mastering its plainer lessons. The present is conspicuously a case in point.

In order to recognize periods as equal, then, it is necessary to take account of silent intervals between words. This is so patent in theory, and so familiar in practice to every reciter, that it is surprising to find it ignored by most English metrists. Few of our prosody-books regard anything but syllables. But to scan by syllables alone is like trying to read a page of music, taking account exclusively of notes, and paying no attention to pauses or "rests." Recognition of these last is as essential in metre as in music. Neglect of them, more than any other cause, produces the unreality so often complained of in the prosody of our grammars. We must trust our ears, and make theory conform to practice. Our ears and our

tongues, in everyday reading, tell us that pause forms an integral part of our metre.

Here, however, a distinction must be noted. We make pauses in reading verse, to bring out the meaning, or merely to draw breath. Some writers have tried to find in these a foundation of verse-structure. Guest's great book on English Rhythms [1] builds on a notion of this kind. A very ingenious attempt on similar lines was made by the late Professor Fleeming Jenkin.[2] Such theories seem to confuse the delivery of verse with its essential rhythm. The pauses which we make in reading poetry are voluntary and optional; one reader makes them and another leaves them out; the same reader will vary them at different times. These surely cannot be parts of structure. All grammarians recognize the "sectional" pause, dividing a line into two, as in this couplet:

> Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees.
> Pope, "Essay of Man," Book I., near end.

Here we naturally pause after "sun" and "stars." The sense requires it, and the line falls of itself into two parts. Yet even this is surely an oratorical pause, not a metrical. It is something imposed on the line from without; something which affects the sense and expression of the line, not its substance. True metrical pause is absolutely part of the line,

[1] "History of English Rhythm," 1838; new edition, edited by Prof. Skeat, 1882.

[2] "On Rhythm in English Verse." See "Memoir" by R. L. Stevenson, 1887, vol. ii.

and is proved such by being in other cases filled up by syllables. If we choose to read for sound instead of sense, scanning rather than reading, we can disregard the "caesura" in the foregoing couplet, with detriment to delivery indeed, but with no detriment to metre. Whereas, in "By came a blackbird," no device of reading will alter the fact that this line contains an element other than its syllables. We feel, and cannot help feeling, that the periods are eked out by something over and above the words. That something I call "pause," and it is immaterial whether the voice pauses *on* the syllables or *between* them. In either case it is an element forming an integral part of the line, and entirely unaffected by any whims or tricks of elocution.

The discretional pauses which we properly and naturally make in delivering a line seem to stand in quite a different category. They do not alter the time of verse. That is no more affected by such than the time of a piece of music is altered when the player stops to turn over a page or to adjust his spectacles. We are all free to pause in reading verse when and where and as often as we please. At each such pause the metre is suspended, and does not begin again till we resume. We may pause in the middle of a period, and take up the measure where we left off, after an absence of minutes or of hours. But this is a very different matter from that integral and necessary pause which forms a constituent part of the line itself, without recognition of which no scansion is complete, and by

ignoring which so much popular scansion is rendered illusory.

That an element of "pause," defined as above, exists in all English verse, a very cursory examination ought sufficiently to show. It is more marked in some types of verse than in others, for a reason which it might be premature at present to discuss. Even in our simplest forms of metre it is discernible. At the beginning of a line it is so common that a name has been given to it, regarded from the converse side as a prefixing of "redundant" syllables; this is technically called "anacrusis." In Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," for example, lines of seven syllables alternate with lines of eight, obviously without change of metre. In our regular "heroic" verse of ten syllables the same phenomenon occurs, though less often; it is easy to find lines of nine syllables, like Shakespeare's

> Stay, the king has thrown his warder down!
> "Richard II.," Act I., Sc. 3.

or Marlowe's

> What is beauty, saith my sufferings then?
> "Tamburlaine," Pt. I., Act V., Sc. 2.

Blank intervals in the middle of a heroic line are somewhat less easy to identify. For it scarcely seems fair to quote lines like Shakespeare's

> Than the soft myrtle*;[1] but man, proud man.
> "Measure for Measure," Act II., Sc. 2.

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[1] The asterisk shows where a syllable has apparently been dropped.

Milton's

Self-fed and self-consum'd*; if this fail.
"Comus," 596.

Or Shelley's

Fresh spring, and summer,* and winter hoar.
"A Lament," 2nd verse.

These, in truth, are at best exceptional, and at worst open to suspicion of error in the text. Still less is it allowable to quote from dramatic verse instances where the words of two speakers join imperfectly, as one writer has quoted from "Hamlet":

"This bodily creation Ecstasy
Is very cunning in."* "Ecstasy!"
"Hamlet," Act III., Sc. 4.

Such *junctura haud callida*,[1] which is not infrequent in Shakespeare, should surely be set down as extra-metrical and perhaps accidental. In our regular heroic verse such instances attract notice from their very rarity. But in other forms of verse, on the contrary, they are familiar and commonplace. How, with regard to pause, can we possibly make metrical such lines as the following?

Toll for the brave,
The brave that are no more.
Cowper, "Royal George."

And sweep through the deep
While the stormy tempests blow.
Campbell, "Mariners of England."

My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal.
Wordsworth, "Ode on Immortality."

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[1] "Ill-fitting *joins*" is a virtual equivalent of this phrase.

There be none of beauty's daughters
With a magic like thee.
Byron, "Stanzas for Music."

Thy brother Death came and cried.
Shelley, "To Night."

Break, break, break
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
Tennyson.

Clear and cool—clear and cool—
By laughing shallow and dreaming pool.
C. Kingsley.

Stand up, look below;
It is our life at thy feet we throw.
Browning, "Flight of the Duchess," § 15.

Where never sound yet was.
Ibid.

And the list might of course be quite indefinitely extended.

Our lyric poetry more particularly, from Shakepeare's Ariel-flights to the "banjo music" of Mr. Kipling, literally cries aloud for due observance of pause. Nor does this hold good only in loose or careless measures. With what fine effect does Miss Rossetti lead off from a dropped syllable in her even-flowing lines:

Does the road wind uphill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
"Poems," "Uphill."

And how subtly does Sydney Dobell vary the monotony of common "eights and sixes" in his well-known ballad:

The murmur of the mourning ghost
That keeps the shadowy kine ;—
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,
The sorrows of thy line ! " [1]

To suppose that the third line in this last quotation is shorter than the first would be indeed ridiculous. Its six syllables clearly fill the same time as the eight of its predecessor, and do so in virtue of that structural element whose recognition is essential to an adequate view of our verse.

But it would profit little to acknowledge, vaguely and generally, the existence of " pause " as a factor, unless we can determine its actual place and function in particular lines. One or two instances shall therefore be quoted where metrical pause is not only unmistakeable, but seems capable of fairly precise measurement. Browning's first " Cavalier Song " [2] begins :

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing.

Here an obvious and necessary suspension of sound after the word " Byng " in the first line seems in the second line exactly filled up by the word " headed." Omit this word, and the two lines are of practically identical structure :

Kentish Sir Byng . . . stood for his King,
Bidding the crop- . . . Parliament swing.

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[1] " Poems," " A Nuptial Eve " See " England in Time of War " (1856), or Poetical Works " (edition of 1875), vol. i., p. 372.

[2] " Selections " (pocket volume edition), p. 140.

The time thus suggested really pervades the whole poem, as will be shown at a later stage.[1] But for the present it is enough to contend that the silent space or *pause* after "Byng" is an integral part of the first line; that its duration is equal to the time taken in pronouncing "headed"; and that in other lines this pause is sometimes left blank, sometimes filled up—partially by one syllable, or wholly by two—but never in any case by more than two syllables. Very similar results appear in the same poet's Epilogue to "Ferishtah's Fancies," where a pause midway in the odd lines will be found filled up by syllables in the even. And Tennyson's beautiful lyric in "Queen Mary" (Act V., Scene 2) exhibits the same correspondence of silence with sound in

> Hapless doom of woman happy in betrothing!
> Beauty passes like a breath, and love is lost in loathing—

though in this case the first line alone contains the pause, all the remaining lines of the short song being furnished with their full tale of syllables.

Such instances—one or two out of very many—seem sufficient to prove the possibility of measuring and determining duration of pause. Analysis need not be carried further at present. It will be seen that the judgement of time appealed to is of the most elementary kind. No "musical faculty," no mathematical appreciation of ratios and proportions, is needed for the enjoyment of verse. This fact is obvious, and speaks for itself. No

[1] Cf. below, p. 86.

doubt the sense of time postulated by verse is akin to that of music, and metrical "periods" are in many respects analogous to musical "bars." It is not wonderful if some have thought that verse can be best written in musical notation, and it may be admitted that this is an improvement on the syllable-counting of ordinary grammar. Music and verse are closely related. They in all probability originated together, and their undue separation was early complained of by the greatest poet-philosopher of Greece. Any reform in scansion will probably illustrate their common origin. But this does not imply that they are one and the same.

> If Music and sweet Poetry agree,
> As they must needs, the sister and the brother,[1]

it does not follow that there is no difference between them, or even that their union is like that of the Siamese twins. Later it will be contended that each has its own method, its own perfection, and that neither processes nor results are identical in the two. But, at this initial stage, it is more useful to dwell on resemblances than on differences. To think of simple metre in terms of music is good, because it tends to emphasize the conception of *time*. That conception, unrepresented on the printed page, and unnoticed in popular prosody,

[1] Richard Barnfield (?), Sonnet "in praise of Musique and Poetrie," first published in "Poems in divers humors" (1599), and formerly ascribed to Shakespeare. See Barnfield's "Poems," edited by Prof. Arber ("English Scholar's Library," No. 14, 1889).

is the most important and the most fundamental principle of English metre. The musician is not likely to neglect it; nor is he likely to think of "periods" as other than uniform. For these reasons, if no other, it seems beneficial to approach English verse in terms of music, at all events in the first stages of study; the beginner will get a more natural, therefore a more satisfactory, idea of scansion by thinking of it in terms with which he is familiar, than by using half-understood names whose application will be shown hereafter to be more than doubtful.

It must not, however, be supposed that conditionment by time is the sole characteristic of an English "period." That is its first and most fundamental principle, and as such has here been placed in the forefront. Its importance can hardly be overestimated, while its appreciation involves the scarcely less important recognition of pauses or silent spaces. But it is the foundation only, not the building. Other elements will be considered in the next two chapters, still dealing with the raw material of verse. Only after that will it be possible to reach combinations of periods, taking up English verse at the point where our prosody usually begins, and showing how this "metre" which we are considering is distinguished into various "metres," The preliminary exposition may seem tedious and technical. But, as it happens, English scansion has been too apt to assume its basic principles at second hand; often, indeed, taking them ready-made from alien prosodies. To do any good, we

must begin at the beginning, and seek to form for ourselves a view of the relation of units to each other, and of the constituting elements which shape each unit. That *time* is the most original and necessary of these is a fact ultimate in our prosody, and strictly in accordance with the history, habits, and development of our English language. All metre really depends upon time. In some literatures its functions is more clearly marked, more readily distinguished, than in ours. Hence it has been possible for critics to ignore its working, to speak as if the connection of syllables in our verse depended on arithmetic instead of on temporal movement. No rational, no adequate, scansion can be based on such notions. English metre is not rightly interpreted till we recognize time-value of periods as its indispensable foundation, and their uniform recurrence as the condition of its rhythm.

NOTE.

I follow the usual spellings of *dissyllable* and *trisyllable*. There is no reason for their difference, and uniformity would be gained by spelling and pronouncing the latter word *tris-syllable*. Or we might speak of *bi-syllables* and *tri-syllables*. The alternative form *di-syllable* seems too revolutionary.

CHAPTER II

THE "PERIOD"—ACCENT

CONSTITUTION by time is the first note of our unit of verse-measurement. But perception of this fact does not explain what gives substance to metre, what lends it character and colour. The period is not a mere space of blank time; it is occupied by words or the intervals between words. These words possess qualities of their own—sensuous, intellectual, emotional—which are turned to due account by the poet. Even in dealing with words, however (in doing which it is usually convenient to break them up into syllables), we never get far away from the primal condition of time-measure. The first necessity felt by the poet is apparently to use his words as indices of time. After that, other qualities come into play, which make his verse rough or smooth, languid or vivacious, and so forth. But his first care—certainly in English, and one is disposed to conclude necessarily in all verse—is to marshal his words so that they shall impress on our ear the sequence of periods, emphasize temporal uniformity, and thus gratify our sense of rhythm. Powerful aid in achieving this is supplied, in our verse, by what is usually called *accent.*

No term, indeed, is more loosely used either in books or in common talk. It seldom means the

same thing in different writers, often not in different pages of the same writer. Some critics identify it with change of tone, some with prolongation of sound, most (of late years, and in reference to English speech) with increase of loudness. It is subdivided under many heads—syntactic or logical, subjective or rhetorical, rhythmical, or etymological.[1] Yet, in broad outline at least, we all know what is meant when a syllable is said to be accented. In the few samples of verse already quoted it is easy to see that—as a rule—each period contains one pretty strongly accented syllable, and that when more than one syllable is contained in a period the less strongly accented either precede or follow the more strongly accented with approximate regularity. This brings under review a very important factor in English verse.

So important is it that recent English prosody usually proclaims it the sole law of our verse. In such alternations of accented with unaccented syllables our metrists claim to find "feet" as definite as those which existed on a different basis in Greek and Latin verse. It will be argued later[2] that this conception is untenable and misleading. At present it may be enough to point out that the regularity postulated is much less complete than these theorists assume, as appears from the fact that they are frequently unable to say which feet are which! No certainty, no finality, rewards their

[1] Schipper, "Grundriss der englischen Metrik" (Vienna, 1895), i. 1, 3.

[2] See Chapter iv., p. 51.

efforts. Our best grammarians are continually found at variance one with another. Carey and Lindley Murray, Clough and Conington, Prof. Masson and Dr. Abbott, Mr. A. J. Ellis and Prof. Mayor, break lances over the nature of particular "feet."[1] The first line of "Paradise Lost" is a

[1] As the names of these feet occur in most metrical discussions, as it is convenient to use them, and as they have a real meaning (to be explained later) in English prosody, a list of the chief ones is appended.

Principal Classic Feet, with descriptions and symbols.

Feet of two syllables.	Pyrrhic . .	short-short . .	⏑ ⏑	
	Spondee . .	long-long . . .	– –	
	Iamb . . .	short-long . .	⏑ –	
	Trochee (or Choree) .	long-short . .	– ⏑	
Feet of three syllables.	Tribrach. .	short-short-short	⏑ ⏑ ⏑	
	Molossus .	long-long-long .	– – –	
	Anapaest .	short-short-long	⏑ ⏑ –	
	Dactyl . .	long-short-short	– ⏑ ⏑	
	Amphibrach	short-long-short	⏑ – ⏑	
	Amphimacēr (or Cretic)	long-short-long .	– ⏑ –	
	Bacchius .	short-long-long .	⏑ – –	
	Antibacchius	long-long-short .	– – ⏑	

The last two names are reversed by some authors.

The name *choree*, which simply means a foot used in choric metre, is most commonly a synonym for trochee, but sometimes for pyrrhic or tribrach. Ruskin uses trochee as a substitute for pyrrhic.

Feet of more than three syllables may be treated as combinations of the above. Thus a *choriamb* (– ⏑ ⏑ –) is a trochee

veritable crux to prosodists. Dr. Abbot scans a particular line in Tennyson's "Idylls" one way, and the poet promptly repudiates the scansion.[1] Prof. Mayor finds iambs[2] where the scheme of metre requires spondees, and trochees where most readers will prefer to detect iambs. Indeed, the untutored reader as well as the expert will often be at a loss to say why a particular sequence of syllables should be classed as one "foot" rather than another. Such nebulousness of result is surely proof of failure in the working of any theory.

To what is this failure due? A full answer to this question would involve exhaustive analysis of the nature and function of accent or "stress." Such analysis might probably reveal undue narrowness and artificiality in the definitions of our schools, and in my belief would exhibit English accent as compounded usually of both force and tone, while duration of sound shows a strong inclination to keep the others company. But it is needless to wade in such deep waters. A sufficient answer will perhaps be found if we assume—as for practical purposes

(choree) followed by an iamb. English writers rarely refer to these, and the feet most frequently mentioned are spondee, iamb, trochee, tribrach, anapaest, and dactyl.

[1] Philological Society's "Transactions," 1873-1874, p. 645.

[2] The references are to Prof. Mayor's "Chapters on English Metre" (first edition, 1886), where (p. 123) only iambs and anapaests are recognized in the first line of Tennyson's "Alcaics," and (p. 188) five trochees are said to exist in a line from "Enoch Arden." The new edition (1901) retains these passages unaltered.

it seems safe to do—that accent is the emphasis,[1] however produced, which selects one or more syllables out of a group of syllables, one or more words out of a group of words. This distinction at once suggests a difference. Roughly speaking, the accent we put on syllables is constant, that we put on words variable. When we pronounce the word "lonely," we always accentuate the first syllable; when the word "alone," always the second. But such fixed accent is a small part only of our speech-cadence. Over and above this, there is the grouping of a sentence, the weight we put on words according to their meaning, "logical accent" if we so like so to term it. This is variable, uncertain, differing in different speakers, or in the same speaker according to his mood. Without reflection, one hardly realizes how vital this is, even in common talk. Think of the significance given by tones of anger, scorn, complaint, affection, interrogation, exclamation. It is often less what we say, than how we say it, that matters. This accent can override the other, can reverse the word-accent, as when we say "to bear and *for*bear," "to please or *dis*please," and so on. Logical accent moulds our speech as a potter his clay. Englishmen are said to use it less than most, but a single sentence pronounced with only syllable-accent will show how widely that differs from normal utterance. The

[1] Emphasis and accent are distinguished by some critics. Their application may differ, the former being concerned chiefly with sentences; but their physical constitution is surely identical. Are they not merely two names for one thing?

gradations of stress, the modulations of voice, what have been well called the "tunes of speech,"[1] dominate our most trivial conversation; in serious and impassioned oratory they become still more inevitable and conspicuous.

Now poetry is speech, of a specially ornate kind. All verse is supposed to be read aloud, and in considering it we must study sound rather than sight, phonetics rather than orthography. Serious poetry demands proper expression; comic, of course, aims at burlesquing this. The "tunes of speech," therefore, as well as the mere syllable-stresses, go to the construction of English verse; and this at once introduces an element of uncertainty. Such uncertainty may even affect metrical pattern.

The line

How happy could I be with either![2]

actually varies in metre according as we emphasize the word "I" or leave it unimportant. Similar doubt attends Browning's line in "Cristina,"[3]

She should never have looked at me.

Probably few persons on first reading Tennyson's

[1] This phrase was familiar to me before reading Sidney Lanier's "Science of English Verse" (Boston, 1880), chapter x., where, however, it receives unusually full exposition, though Lanier seems to aproach verse too exclusively from the side of music.

[2] Gay, "Beggar's Opera" (1728), Act II., Sc. 2.

[3] "Selections" (as before), p. 152.

> O great and gallant Scott,
> True gentleman, heart, blood, and bone,[1]

will take up the intended measure of the second line. His verse in "Enoch Arden,"

> Take your own time, Annie, take your own time,

can be read differently according as we put the main stress on "own," or on "time," or on both. The first line of "Paradise Lost" varies in accentuation with the importance given to "first," to the "dis-" of "disobedience," and so forth. How can any stable structure be reared on a foundation like this? How can exact "feet" be framed from material so elusive and illusory? It is trying to make ropes of sand. To base prosody on accentuation seems hopelessly futile, so long as our word-accent is thus at the mercy of our sentence-accent, and the latter is a thing capricious and fugitive and chameleon-like in its changes.

Other arguments might be added, but the foregoing seems sufficiently to show that no prosody building on stress alone can be definite or exact. This, however, must not lead us to underestimate the value of accent. It is a feature of vast importance in our speech, and therefore in our verse. It shapes everything else to its use, except only the conditioning element of time. It moulds syllables like wax, altering their resonance and weight. And its alternations are habitually used by the poet to signalize time. Their approximate uniform recurrence impresses on us the absolute recurrence of

[1] "The Death of Oenone, and other Poems" (1892), p. 48.

periods. Accent is truly our *ictus metricus*, emphasizing rhythm. We do not require to beat time with hand or foot; the words themselves do it for us. But those who make accent the constitutive principle of English metre seem to confound this *ictus* with the structure it illustrates, the "period" with the bell which calls attention to it.

This may be put more plainly and practically. Every period usually contains one and only one syllable of stronger accentuation, and these usually alternate with others of weaker accentuation. But this is far from being an absolute law. The word "usually" must not be read as "always." Milton's blank verse normally carries five accents, yet all critics agree that there are lines in "Paradise Lost" with only four. How do such lines remain metrical? They remain so because each line consists of five periods, though in the case assumed not every period is signalized by accent. Periodicity is the essential quality, accentuation its usual but not invariable exponent. To identify these is to confuse essence with accident, the thing illustrated with the thing which illustrates.

To get a clear idea of how accent affect periods, and perhaps incidentally rid ourselves of erroneous conceptions of its working, it may be well to consider for a moment its precise relation to a group of syllables. This can be done without going far into technicalities. Speech involves successive emissions of voice. The flow is never continuous. Every syllable contains one vowel, but it usually also contains consonants which check and break

up the vocal stream. Even when speech contains vowels alone, the flow is interrupted; each vocal sound is separated from its neighbour by a slackening of voice, as will appear if we repeat any consecutive series of pure vowels. These increases and decreases of pressure, these diminutions and augmentations of the vocal current, constitute a large part at least of what we have agreed to call "accent." Can we find any law determining their progress, any fact pointing to a *unit of accentuation*, as the "period" creates a *unit of verse?*

A bold attempt to answer this question was made by the anonymous author of "Accent and Rhythm explained by the Law of Monopressures" (Blackwood, 1888), a book whose argument has been adopted and amplified by Prof. Skeat, first in his "Chaucer" (introduction to vol. vi., pp. lxxxii-xcvii), more lately in a paper published in the Philological Society's "Transactions" (1895-1898, pp. 484-503). Both writers declare the limit of a single pressure to be *three syllables.* One, two, or three syllables —but not more—may be included in a "monopressure." When it embraces only two syllables, the maximum pressure (identified with accent) may be on either syllable; when three, this *must* be on the mid-syllable. It is not meant that a separate breath is required for each monopressure; very many of these can be rattled off in one breath by fluent speakers. But each is is distinct and distinguishable, a definite exertion of vocal force, of which we may note the beginning, middle, and end. Such a word as *tremendous*, for example, can

be uttered on one pressure; a word like *intervene* requires two, on the first syllable and the last. All words of more than three syllables require two pressures. There are therefore only four possible varieties of monopressure; one on a monosyllable, two upon dissyllables, one on the form of trisyllable instanced above. A simple sign being devised for each of these varieties, it is claimed that all units of speech can be indicated by these, and that for verse a system of notation is created which supersedes division into "feet."

The theory is ingenious and striking, and no doubt in the main illustrates and explains our habit of speech. But, with all deference to the high authority of its supporter, one may doubt whether it is not expressed much too absolutely. Does the limitation to three syllables really hold good? Can four never be uttered on one pressure? The original author quotes no words of four syllables, but jumps at once from three to five, and easily establishes that words like *accommodating*, *reverberating*, etc., require more than one pressure. But what of a host of words like *memorial*, *superfluous*, *imagining?* Is it so certain that these require two pressures? The theory also necessitates two pressures on trisyllables like *unity*, *memory*, *cynical*, *fugitive*, *devious*, *trumpeter*. Is this quite beyond doubt? *Refinement* would be a word of one pressure; why need *indolent* have more? Such words must of course be considered, not in isolation, but as they occur in a sentence—*memory asserts*, *unity demands*, and the like. Surely phrases like these

last can be embraced in two pressures? That three unaccented syllables cannot come together is a favourite doctrine of metrists; Prof. Skeat, more cautious, only says that such "would ruin any verse." We shall see later that the practice of poets by no means bears out either assertion.[1] Further, is it right to distinguish thus broadly between accented and unaccented syllables? The authors themselves say that pressure increases, reaches its height, diminishes; do not syllables manifest its impact in varying degrees? In his later paper, Prof. Skeat recognizes secondary as well as primary accent. But even this concession seems inadequate, nor does it appear why a syllable is held capable of receiving only one degree of stress during its utterance.

Again, and with special view to our present purpose, in its application to verse this theory helps little. The units into which it divides a line are irregular, and are identical with the units of prose speech. Is there then no difference between prose and verse? Unless our analysts establish some principle which makes these units metrical, they really give no theory of verse-structure at all. Doubtless, most verse can be resolved into the collocations which their symbols represent. That merely proves that the collocations exist, not that they constitute metre. Poetry and prose alike employ words; what we want to know is, wherein do they differ in doing so. The units which these writers recognize are the units which are common to both, nor

[1] *Infra*, p. 96.

is any law of arrangement suggested in virtue of which these units are grouped, here into verse, there into prose.

Even, however, if we cannot accept this theory as final, it may aid us to realize the precise way in which accent is related to rhythm. Swellings and slackenings of voice, regulated by the principle of monopressure, give potent aid to the poet by marking his periods. When two syllables occupy a period, one is usually more strongly emphasized by accent than the other. It is seldom correct to speak of them as accented and unaccented; occasionally the difference may be sufficient to justify these terms, but in most cases it is comparative only, and sometimes may not exist at all. We are dealing with a customary sequence, and not an invariable law. The more helpful plan is to regard accent as progressive. It is an increase or decrease of pressure, not a sudden stress. As a rule, accentual impact either increases or diminishes throughout a period. The poet arranges his words so that these alternations occur consecutively. He does not, indeed, tie himself to do so slavishly; such verse would become intolerably monotonous. But he does it with approximate regularity sufficient to enforce underlying rhythm. Accent is not rhythm, but it tends to act rhythmically, and its alternations aid us in recognizing periods. As a general rule, accentual pressure culminates once in a period; and this is equally true whatever the number of of syllables contained in the period. Obviously, this is a potent engine ready to the poet's hand.

Without it, he might be driven to mark his periods by artificial means—by musical accompaniment, or other methods of denoting time. In some languages such devices may conceivably be necessary; with us at at least they are not. Accent supplies an index of time in English verse, and it does so by progressive action and reaction under the law of monopressure.

Regularity of accentuation is no canon of English verse. All our poets vary its incidence, some much more largely than others. Not only does this avoid monotony; if skilfully used, it sharpens our perception of rhythm. Too much regularity dulls attention, which may be startled awake by an unexpected change. A dropped accent, like a dropped syllable, may minister to our perception of periodic recurrence. Full exemplification of this will be given at a later stage, but here it is sufficient to indicate it as obvious; so obvious, that it would be surprising if our poets failed to utilize it. Their doing so, however, is clear proof that accentuation does not constitute the sole and invariable basis of our verse; its essential unchanging element must be sought in that which underlies both syllables and stresses.

Accentual monopressure very probably also determines the length of periods. It need not be assumed to do so directly, but rather to suggest a natural duration, which is accepted and made invariable by the rhythmical faculty. The absolute length of periods really matters very little, their mutual relation being the point of importance. But

it is interesting to speculate what caused periods to exist, and determined their duration. While it would be rash to assume that they are actually constituted by accentual pressure, it seems highly probable that this indicated a natural and appropriate length for the unit. The fact that temporal and accentual units habitually coincide is at all events a fact of considerable interest.[1]

Accent may be regarded, therefore, as partly a constitutive but mainly a signalizing element in English verse. It is constitutive so far as it shapes syllables, not merely bringing them into greater or less prominence, but sometimes actually changing their structure. Its main function, however, is to signalize periodicity. It does not create the regularity of verse, since that exists apart from accent, and can be impressed on our ear by variation or omission of accent. But normally it is used as an exponent of regularity. Its approximately uniform recurrences illustrate the fundamental uniformity of rhythm. By its alternations we are aided to realize the unbroken succession of periods. These alternations should be conceived of as progressive, rather than as a series of abrupt changes; progressive even during the utterance of single syllables,

[1] The latest scientific investigator among American metrists ("An Introduction to the Study of Poetry," Prof. Mark H. Liddell, New York, 1902) regards this relation as one of cause and effect. His units are "rhythm-waves," depending on the meaning of a line. Perhaps this exaggerates the intellectual side of verse—the temporal receives inadequate recognition —but its concurrence with the idea of "monopressure" is suggestive. The volume deserves careful study.

always during that of successive syllables. The best rationale of their habitual mode of action seems that given by the law of monopressures. So regarded, accent claims a leading place in our analysis. All critics admit this claim. From the infancy of our literature accent has been acknowledged a prominent feature of our verse. Its prominence is manifest, undeniable; its importance has been fully recognized in previous pages. But it is not and cannot be the sole law of our verse. Were it so, a prose sentence printed in lines would be indistinguishable from poetry. Those who hold that stresses alone constitute verse omit Hamlet from their play. Stresses without time cannot make verse; when conditioned by time, they cease to be fundamental. Counting of stresses is but a shade less mechanical than counting of syllables. Temporal periods, usually occupied by syllables, and habitually denoted by stress, must be regarded as the true basis of our verse; and the part thus assigned to stress or accent is sufficiently important. This, however, is not its only function. Our poets also use it in countless delicate ways, which almost defy analysis and laugh to scorn our pedantry of nomenclature, to give subtlety and grace and variety to their verse. These will be considered when we come to combinations of periods. At present it is enough to get a general idea of the nature and working of accent, and the foregoing statement seems amply to explain and justify the high place always given to it in English prosody.

CHAPTER III

THE "PERIOD"—QUANTITY

ANOTHER factor in the construction of verse is what is technically termed "quantity." By this is meant the bulk of syllables (*quantus*, "how great"), as measured by the time they take to utter. Time-value reigns again supreme, though in a narrower field. "Quantity" is sometimes given a wider sense, to include silent spaces as well as syllables, being thus made virtually synonymous with time. Here, for the sake of clearness, it shall be restricted to its more definite use, which is that familiar to English metrists. As applied to syllables it takes account of structure only, not of accentuation, unless the latter can be shown to affect the time taken in pronouncing.

When this definition is laid before an English reader, he may be inclined to ask whether it has any real meaning. Do syllables differ in time of pronouncing? "I know," he may say, "what you mean by more or less strongly accented syllables. I recognize a difference between these, though I may not be able to define its exact nature and degree. But a difference in time-value is much more doubtful. Do not all syllables take practically the same time to utter, unless perhaps the strongly accented take a shade longer than the weakly

accented? Are you not simply reintroducing under a new name the distinction already taken cognizance of in last chapter?"

He will not be alone in feeling these doubts. Very eminent critics have expressed them. The conception comes from Classic metre, and Classical scholars seem particularly incredulous of its applicability to English verse; the late Prof. H. A. J. Munro, of Cambridge, proclaimed this incredulity in remarkably strong terms.[1] Our poets, on the other hand, incline to believe in it; Tennyson's "Life,"[2] by his son, shows him an earnest student of quantity. Whom shall we trust, poet or critic? Neither, if we are wise, but examine for ourselves, and draw our own conclusions. In so doing, it will be necessary to refer briefly to the structure of Greek and Latin metre, that we may be able to distinguish—as even eminent critics have not always done—the fact of "quantity" from the Classic rules for its observance.

The very notion of quantity is unfamiliar to us in English. We pay no attention to this characteristic of syllables, and often neglect differences due to it, slurring unaccented syllables till they are barely heard. Other nations have different habits. The old Greeks and Romans gave such distinction and prominence to time-value, that it became the index

[1] See Cambridge Philosophical Society's "Transactions," vol. x. (1864) pp. 374-402. Munro's paper is dated February, 1860, and an appendix is dated July, 1861. The paper is often quoted in contemporary controversy.

[2] "Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A Memoir." 2 vols. (1897.)

of their verse; they used it, as we use accent, to emphasize rhythm. They classified all syllables as either *long* or *short*, and accounted one long syllable exactly equal to two short. (This last was probably a metrical convention; but to secure acceptance it must have accorded in the main with fact.) A few syllables were exceptional, might change their quantity under special conditions. All others remained long or short, absolutely and under all circumstances. To make an error in quantity showed clownish ignorance, comparable to our wrongly accenting a familiar word. It is still held to disgrace anyone pretending to knowledge of the Classics, though he must have learned by rule what living languages teach by ear.

Two principles created this quantity. A syllable containing a long vowel was always long. (Short vowels and long were doubtless distinguished in speech; the Greeks had different letters for long *O* and short *O*, long *E* and short *E*.) And a syllable containing a short vowel followed by two or more consonants was also long. Many grammars confuse matters by stating that in this latter case the *vowel* became long, but this seems erroneous; the best authorities say only that the *syllable* was reckoned long. It was so reckoned, I imagine, simply because a plurality of consonants took as long to pronounce as did a long vowel. They computed, it should be said, always from vowel to vowel, so that all consonants preceding a vowel in any syllable affected the quantity, not of that syllable, but of its predecessor. And so nice were their ears that two

consonants following a vowel were sufficient to constitute length; the only short syllable was that containing a short vowel separated by but *one* consonant from the vowel of the following syllable.

Now there is no reason to suppose that their rules regarding quantity hold good in English. Our habits of speech are different, our ears are differently trained. But the fact of quantity remains, and is based on the same broad principles. For, first, we also have differences among our vowels, which our grammarians hold to be differences in length. Recent philology, indeed, tends to call these differences of quality rather than quantity, and speaks of open and shut more than of long and short vowels. But the difference at any rate exists, and can be used for metrical purposes. We all recognize a difference between the vowel-sounds in *bat* and *bar*, *net* and *neat*, *ill* and *isle*, *hop* and *hope*, *luff* and *lure*. The alternative pronunciations of *knŏwledge* and *knōwledge*, *prĭmer* and *prīmer*, turn wholly on this difference. And, as it is commonly regarded as a difference in length, our poets would be justified in treating it as such.

The second distinction is still more palpable. A syllable encumbered with many consonants must, in the nature of things, take more time to pronounce than one with fewer. Here, again, our philologists complicate issues by talking of long and short *consonants*, and of consonants whose effect is to shorten a weak vowel. But it seems doubtful whether such niceties appeal to any ordinary reader, seeing that (as above said) our ears are habitually insensitive

to minute differences of quantity. They are not, however, so hopelessly dulled as to be unable to realize that a syllable like *shouldst* must take longer to pronounce fully than a syllable like *shut*. A broad distinction of this kind is all we really want. It is sufficient to create metrical difference, and there is no necessity to push analysis further.

It does not follow that our poets use these differences consciously, much less that they are bound by fixed rules. The Latin rules are almost certainly too narrow for our usage. Our speech so abounds in consonants, and we are accustomed to get over them so glibly, that two consonants are probably insufficient to create an idea of length. One English poet, at any rate, proposed a much wider range.[1] Again, our spelling is a much less safe guide than was the Latin. Quantity of course depends on sound, and letters should represent vocal utterances. But our alphabet is notoriously chaotic in this respect. Single letters represent double or even triple sounds, and double letters represent single sounds, while our pronunciation is very far from being reproduced in our spelling. Our habits of speech, moreover, are often peculiar. When the modern Italian pronounces words like *bocca*, *donna*, he sounds both the doubled consonants; and there can be little doubt that the ancient Italian did the same. But in our utterance of words like *bucket* or *bonnet* only one consonantal sound divides the syllables, and the first syllables of these words cannot

1 Charles Kingsley, "Life and Letters," vol. i., p. 347.

possibly be accounted long. Anyone trying to make quantitative rules for English would have to begin by reforming our alphabet. Even as regards broad facts of quantity we must be content to adopt a phonetic standpoint. We must remember that both *one* and *won* are pronounced as if written *wun*, that two consonants really separate the syllables in *exist* or *agile*, and only one in *happy*, *mother*, or *gushing*. In fact, for the purposes of this chapter, we must ignore spelling, and go wholly by sound.

Proceeding on this basis, and regarding—here as always—deduction from practice as the only possible method of proof, let us see whether our poets do appear to make use of such quantitative difference. For argument's sake, let some such rule as the Latin be assumed, founded on the two broad principles aforesaid. Even though inadequate in itself, this may indicate the general drift and tendency of our verse in relation to quantity; and it is to that general aspect alone that attention is invited.

A very common type of verse is where the accentual stress culminates on the *even* as distinguished from the *odd* syllables of a line. This may be illustrated by a couplet from Marvell, the even syllables being italicized for easier reference:

> And *all* the *way*, to *guide* their *chime*,
> With *fall*ing *vars* they *kept* the *time*.[1]

It will be noticed that every italicized syllable here is *long*, on the principles tentatively assumed. The

[1] Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), "Song of the Emigrants in Bermuda."

remaining syllables, however, are not with equal constancy *short*. This is just what might have been expected, from the relative unimportance of lightly accented syllables in our speech. It is natural that our poets should obey the spirit of their language. Let us, like them, attend mainly to syllables of predominant accentuation, and study some cases from this standpoint.

In the following instances, taken from Moore, the syllables of chief accentuation are again printed in italics:

> The *turf* shall *be* my *fra*grant *shrine*,
> My *tem*ple, *Lord*! that *arch* of *thine*;
> My *cen*ser's *breath* the *moun*tain *airs*,
> And *si*lent *thoughts* my *on*ly *prayers*.
>
> "Sacred Songs."

It will readily be seen that here, likewise, the italicized syllables are to be considered *long*. A more extended quotation from the same writer will give greater scope for observing:

> The *harp*, that *once* thro' *Ta*ra's *halls*
> The *soul* of *mu*sic *shed*,
> Now *hangs* as *mute* on *Ta*ra's *walls*
> As *if* that *soul* were *fled*.
> So *sleeps* the *pride* of *for*mer *days*,
> So *glo*ry's *thrill* is *o'er*,
> And *hearts* that *once* beat *high* for *praise*
> Now *feel* that *pulse* no *more*.
>
> No *more* to *chiefs* and *la*dies *bright*
> The *harp* of *Ta*ra *swells*;
> The *chord* a*lone* that *breaks* at *night*
> Its *tale* of *ru*in *tells*.

Thus *Free*dom *now* so *sel*dom *wakes*,
The *on*ly *throb* she *gives*
Is *when* some *heart* in*dig*nant *breaks*,
To *show* that *still* she *lives*.
"Irish Melodies."

In these stanzas, with one possible exception (the word *thrill*), each italicized syllable would rank as *long*. (*Shed* and *fled* are not exceptions, for the last syllable of a line is accounted long in any case, doubtless because reinforced by a pause.) Lest it should be supposed that this structure is peculiar to verse of one type, an instance may be taken from lines where alternation is more irregular, while the syllables of main stress are still easy to identify:

The *min*strel *boy* to the *war* is *gone*,
In the *ranks* of *death* you'll *find* him;
His *fa*ther's *sword* he has *gir*ded *on*,
And his *wild* harp *slung* be*hind* him.
"*Land* of *song*!" said the *war*rior *bard*,
"Though *all* the *world* be*trays* thee,
One *sword*, at *least*, thy *rights* shall *guard*,
One *faith*ful *harp* shall *praise* thee."
Ibid.

Here, without any exception, the italicized syllables would be reckoned as long.

These, of course, are selected instances. They are taken from verse that is easy to dissect. More varied cadences would perplex the issue, and distract attention from the point raised. Yet the reader may be asked to study for himself, in the light of these principles, some lines taken almost at random from Tennyson's blank verse:

The weight of all the hopes of half the world.
The voice of days of old and days to be.
Where all of high and holy dies away.
Again for glory, while the golden lyre.
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ.
The craft of kindred, and the godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea.
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot.
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong.
As in the golden days before thy sin.

While there is rather more variety of movement in some of these lines, the quantitative structure in each case seems sufficiently well marked.

One more example shall be cited, this time from a poet whose work demonstrates, better almost than any other in our language, the fine results attained by respecting principles of quantity, as regards both vowel-length and consonant-aggregation. The following stanza from Mr. Swinburne's "In the Bay"[1] also well illustrates the effect produced by occasional inversion of accent, emphatic stress being shifted from even to odd syllable, and quantity accompanying:

Above the broad sweep of the breathless bay
Southwestward, far past flight of night and day,
Lower than the sunken sunset sinks, and higher
Than dawn can freak the front of heaven with fire,
My thought with eyes and wings made wide makes way
To find the place of souls that I desire.

Critics will notice that the last line here, like the first quoted from Tennyson, comes very near indeed to pure iambic cadence.

[1] "Poems and Ballads," second series (1878).

It will not be imagined that any law is being laid down, requiring stress and quantity to coincide in our verse. Such a notion could not withstand a moment's examination. The reader has been warned not to expect any fixed rule, and reminded that our wealth of consonants makes syllables which are short by Latin rule exceptional in our language. Yet, if we look at facts rather than rules, we do seem to come upon traces of a real use of quantity. Such instances as have been quoted can hardly be quite fortuitous. Our poets do, in certain cases at least, appear to take pleasure in supplementing accent by sound; in other cases they may delight in contrasting them. Evidently there are metrical effects to be obtained in either way. When weakly accented syllables are short, the line moves with lightness and rapidity; when long, it gains weight and dignity. Again, the result varies according as syllables of main accentuation derive their length from vowel-sound or from frequence of consonants. Fine effects certainly come from the former, as in Moore's:

> And *false* the *light* on *glo*ry's *plume*,
> As *fa*ding *clouds* of *even*.
>
> "Sacred Songs."

Yet the latter also is impressive. These are cases of coincidence, but contrast of accent and quantity may produce other effects, as fine in their way. All that can be claimed is that writers do use this element, and it would be strange if they did not. It is obviously a factor capable of achieving considerable results. If our poets were so ill-advised

as to neglect it entirely, they would deserve blame for not making the best use of their instrument. I submit that they do make habitual use of it, and that no theory which leaves this out of account can give a complete view of English prosody.

Of course, it is always acknowledged that our poets delight in sound for its own sake: Milton in his sonorous proper names, Shakespeare in the vowel-music of

> Take, oh take those lips away
> That so sweetly were forsworn,

and

> Blow, blow, thou winter wind!

But the present contention goes somewhat farther, and argues that they use it—so to say—as form, not only as colour. Besides, vowel-sound is not the only source of length. If we examine such a piece of regular verse as Gray's "Elegy," I think it will appear that stress and quantity coincide more frequently than might have been expected, but that vowel-sound is less prominent than in the best work of greater poets. The question, however, is not so much whether quantitative difference is used at all by our poets, as whether it is used by them (consciously or unconsciously) as an element of metrical structure. Is it possible to determine this point?

An affirmative answer would be easy, if every case where one syllable alternates with two were held a case in point. But this would be to forget the function of pause. When Burns writes,

> The wan moon is setting beyond the white wave,
> And *time* is setting with me, . . .

the italicized word clearly might be replaced by a dissyllable, but it is hard to say whether it owes its place to quantity, or to being followed by a fraction of silence. Again, there are countless examples of words like *fire*, *tire*, *flower*, *hour*, *heaven*, *chasm*, *world*, etc., occupying the space of two syllables, as in this line from Tennyson's "Lotos-Eaters":

> And in the stream the long-leav'd flowers weep.

It may be argued that such words are used as veritable dissyllables rather than prolonged monosyllables. But is not such use due to quantity? When Scott's burr makes two syllables of "corn" in

> Shall tame the unicorn's pride.
> "Lay of the Last Minstrel," Canto I.

or when Prof. Blackie expands "Cairngorm" into four syllables:

> See that kingly Cairngorm
> With his heaven-kissing crown.
> "Glenfeshie."

or even when Wither writes:

> By the murmur of a spring,
> Or the least bough's *rustling*.[1]
> "Shepherd's Hunting," 4th Eclogue.

is it not quantity which dictates the prolongation? Perhaps no case can be quite free from doubt, but I ask the reader to study carefully the italicized words in the following extracts:

[1] Old editions write "rusteling." But the spelling is due to the quantity, and parallel cases are not very uncommon.

O wert thou in the *cauld* blast.

Burns.

Oh mount and go,
Mount and make you ready.

Burns.

This *ae* night, this *ae* night,
Every night and all.

Northumbrian ballad.

March borrows from April
Three days, and they are ill.

Old rhyme.

Morning, evening, noon, and night,
Praise God! sang Theocrite.

Browning.[1]

All of life's a *cry* just of weariness and woe, love!

Browning.[2]

Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel-true and *blade*-straight
The great Artificer made my mate.

R. L. Stevenson.

All, all are gone, but still lives on
The fame of those who died,
And *true* men, like *you*, men,
Remember them with pride.

Irish poem.[3]

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1 "Selections," p. 65, "The Boy and the Angel."

2 Epilogue to "Ferishtah's Fancies."

3 From "Nation" newspaper. See "Treasury of Irish Poetry" (London, 1900), p. 143. This particular cadence is common in Scots poetry, and usually depends on bold use of pause. But pause is not required when quantity suffices. (The poem is by Prof. J. K. Ingram, and will be found in his collected "Sonnets and other poems," 1900, p. 104.)

In each of these cases the italicized syllable must be read as equal to an ordinary dissyllable, and it seems to me—perhaps it should be recorded as a personal impression only—that quantity is the agent responsible for the prolongation.

Moreover, we can seldom substitute a long syllable for a short one, or *vice versa*, without detriment to metre. When Tennyson writes,

> Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
> Shoots to the fall.
>
> "A Dedication."

the charm of the first line depends much on the shortness of the word *rapid*. Substitute a word of like accentuation but different quantity—such as *ramblings*, for instance—and the line would limp heavily. This is too obvious to need enforcement, and the converse is less so only because English ears are prompt to reinforce defective quantity by pause. It may be objected that such differences affect rather the melody than the metre of a line; but can the two be thus separated? Quantity, in English verse, certainly does not hold anything like the place it did in Classic; no one dreams of asserting that. Neglect of it, with us, rather deforms than destroys structure, making a line unmusical rather than strictly unmetrical. Even so, it is a fact of our prosody. We are all offended when a line is too grossly choked with consonants, as in this choice instance (whose authorship I have forgotten):

> 'Twas thou that smooth'd'st the rough rugg'd bed of pain.

Probably we are also most gratified when the use of

quantity is least obtrusive; when we feel that a line flows well without too readily perceiving why it does so. Quantity is not with us a matter of definite rule. It may be rather an added grace than a structural necessity. But that it does in a hundred ways affect the charm, the movement, the melodiousness of English verse seems a truth incapable of dispute; and that our poets should fail to take advantage of this fact is a contingency so improbable that it may be safely accounted impossible.

Quantity, in our verse, has an ancillary function. Those few writers—scholars rather than poets—who have composed lines based solely on quantity may be said to sin against the genius of their language. But its place, if subordinate, is still real. Just as we found our grammars at fault through ignoring the constitutive work of *pause*, so here they seem to seek in neglecting the effect contributed by *quantity* to building up line-structure. This, like other elements, is not properly considered when it is taken by itself. An organism can be dissected, its different fibres shown separately for purposes of study. In the live creature they are closely intertwined, and cannot be torn apart without mortal danger. So it is here. Each of the elements which go to make verse acts and reacts on each other. They have been dealt with separately in these introductory chapters; for clearer analysis, they have been shown in artificial and unnatural isolation. Their working is not rightly understood till we study them in combination. Quantity and

pause often blend till they are indistinguishable, as has been already shown; time and stress have intimate relations. The "period," or unit of verse-measurement, is the live organism in which these elements unite. Henceforward — passing from statement to verification of principles—we shall be able to deal with the period as a whole. Analysis of details, unsatisfactory at best, because separating what is really conjoined, will have done its work if it teach us to recognize in union what we have studied in isolation. The various elements we have been considering combine and conspire to make a living reality of English verse.

CHAPTER IV

DUPLE METRE (GENERAL)

TIME, Accent, and Quantity have been seen to be the chief influences shaping our verse; but (since time and quantity are the same thing when predicated of syllables) its actual units may be better described as affected by Accent, Quantity, and Pause. Equality of time-measure underlies all, the ultimate reality, the essential basis. But "periods" are occupied by words, which form the malleable material handled by our poets. Greater or less intensification of syllables; their comparative bulk and substance; their occasional omission and replacement by an interval of silence; these are the leading facts of which it seems necessary to take account. English verse consists of rhythmical units, made and coloured by the working of these factors. Such is the conception arrived at in previous chapters, which it remains to test by further comparison of instances. Prosody knows no other test. No one can tell beforehand how English verse should be written; we can determine only how it has been written. This does not imply that poets are impeccable; but it implies that their practice is the sole court of proof. Rules must be deduced from observation; theory must never outrun experience.

It would have been well for English metrical science had this truth been always remembered.

The only observation of other than analytical import made in previous pages relates to the number of syllables in a period. We have seen that in some cases two syllables seem normally to occupy a period, in other cases more than two; a fact probably due to, or at least closely connected with, the limit of accentual monopressure. This fact shall be our starting point, and no better could be chosen. For it leads to recognition of the most important general distinction in English metre. This distinction is so vital, and so far-reaching, that it may be said to swallow up most minor differences. Naturally, therefore, it has to do with time. We have two leading types of verse, in one of which the time-space or unit represents the normal time of two syllables, in the other that of three. This initial distinction corresponds to the musical division of time into *duple* and *triple*.[1]

The validity of this distinction has indeed been questioned. Guest, criticizing Mitford, objects that were it real we should find it more clearly marked in earlier than in later verse.[2] This seems curious reasoning. On the contrary, one would naturally expect the two types to be imperfectly distinguished in our primitive literature, and gradually differentiated as our poetry developed. That is what really

[1] *Common* and *triple* are the usual terms, but the above refers only to one branch of common time, and that, I believe, is correctly described by the word *duple*.

[2] As before, p. 161.

happened. It was long before the two were clearly separated and classed as different *genera*. Duple-time verse, being the more consonant to our speech-habit, was for long considered practically our one form of metre. The other was detached from it by degrees and with difficulty. Nine-tenths of our whole verse, at a rough guess, moves to duple time; to it, therefore, our first attention is due.

But another objector will ask "How do we know the time of two syllables?" The absolute time they take to utter we of course do not know; it may vary with every speaker. All we know, or need to know, is their relative time. Ruskin, indeed, in a singular passage,[1] desired that "the time of metres [*i.e.*, periods] should be defined positively no less than relatively": but this seems as impossible as it would be useless. Time, in this context, means proportional and relative time. To say we do not know time in this sense would destroy the foundation alike of music and metre. No faculty seems more widely diffused than this. Children and savages usually possess it, and delight in its exercise. If anyone be really destitute of this sense—if the difference between duple and triple time has no meaning for him—then on such a person the cadence of verse would probably be found altogether thrown away.

Thus understood the distinction seems as real as it is universally intelligible. What we are required to know is not "the time of two syllables," but merely the time-beat to which two syllables are marshalled. The syllables do not create the time,

[1] "Elements of English Prosody" (1880), p. 5.

and we have yet to see what precise relation they bear to it. Dealing with syllables exclusively, English metrists have come to some very strange conclusions about our verse, which are reflected in popular terminology. Before going further, let us see whether these will bear examination. The questions raised affect the nature as well as names of our chief rhythms, so must be dealt with on the threshold of any investigation. They involve, it need hardly be said, a passing reference to the chief types of Greek or Latin verse.

Classic metre had "feet" of two and of three syllables. Their names are transferred to our prosody, but with a difference, accent being made the basis instead of quantity. One objection to doing so has been incidentally pointed out,[1] but a far stronger remains to notice. As applied, these names are at once meaningless and mischievous. An "accentual foot" is a contradiction in terms. Accent no more creates a "foot" than the colour of a peach makes it round. The transference is meaningless, or at best metaphorical, and might be allowed to pass were the metaphor harmless. But in practice it is far from innocuous. It leads people to assume, naturally enough, though irrationally, that the time of an English unit agrees with that of its supposed prototype. No greater mistake could well be made.

Demonstration of this can scarcely be forthcoming, since we have no positive record of time. Strong confirmation, at least, may be drawn from

[1] *Ante*, p. 18.

admitted characteristics in each case. To Greeks and Romans *dactylic* was a weighty, sonorous, regular measure, used for heroic themes; *iambic* a light, pliant, colloquial type of verse, admitting greater variety. With us, though the names are identical, the characters are reversed, So-called "iambic" is by common consent our heroic measure, while to so-called "dactylic" and "anapaestic" belong greater lightness and vivacity. Surely this is enough to discredit any fancied resemblance. That no real analogy exists can be proved in another way.

The best Greek authorities classified feet by their movement, not by syllables. Thus the *dactyl* divided evenly, its one long and two short syllables balancing exactly; the *iamb* divided unevenly, wherefore two such feet were needed to make a unit. Adopting this more rational principle of analysis, we perceive the movement of our metres to be just the reverse of what is popularly assumed. Our heroic verse is clearly the regular, even, stately measure, moving to duple time; our "jiggy" three-syllable metres belong with appropriateness to triple rhythm. This brings our verse-forms into harmony at once with ancient metre and modern music. It follows, however, that the Classic names are misapplied by our grammars. They should be kept to mean what they meant in ancient verse, not used in that spurious metaphorical sense which is wholly misleading. Duple-time verse, for example, has nothing in common with ancient iambic.

It cannot be expected that these assertions will escape criticism. Does, it will be asked, our heroic

verse really exemplify even measure? Take a line previously quoted from Tennyson:

> The weight of all the hopes of half the world.
> "Princess," Section IV.

Do not these words manifestly move to uneven, that is to iambic, time? Undoubtedly they do, in and by themselves. Their ten syllables can be divided into five very tolerable iambs, in the real as well as the metaphorical sense. But *do the words occupy the whole time of the verse?* If they do, how is it possible for the same metre to contain such very different syllables as these of Milton's?—

> Say, Muse, their names then known, who first, who last.
> "Paradise Lost," I. 376.

To call this a substitution of spondees for iambs is to explain nothing. A line which could admit five spondees instead of five iambs, without other compensating change, would be a monstrosity. The total time of verse cannot alter in that way. But the only other possible explanation is that in one case the line contains something other than its words. That this is the true and simple explanation seems beyond doubt. The time-measure of each line is identical, but in one case it is less completely filled by syllables. This view presents no difficulty, when one has grasped the fact that time-spaces exist apart from the syllables embedded in them. There is correspondence between the two, no doubt, but it is not necessarily exact. Even as regards mere number of syllables, a duple period need not always contain two syllables, nor a triple three. That

number of syllables is no infallible guide to time, and that we are conscious of time as distinct from syllabic structure, a single further instance will conclusively show.

What is the metre of this line:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills?

No one, reading it, would doubt its iambic structure. It would be taken unhesitatingly for a line of "heroic verse." Yet, if we turn to Tennyson's poem, "The Higher Pantheism," we shall find these words in the first line, followed by other three: "and the plains." This addition works a notable change. That one word "and," coming where it does, suggests that the metre is not what we supposed it, that the time underlying the whole poem is not duple but triple. Our ear responds at once, prepares us to find more syllables in following lines, to enjoy the music of such later lines as:

Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet;
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

It is like poetical magic, and shows the extreme sensitiveness of our ears to any direction affecting time. But it shows more than this. The first line cannot be supposed to be in a different metre from the others. The measure is clearly the same, though syllables are fewer, and this implies that the periods contain silence as well as sound. At any rate, in this case, the words by themselves do not give the

time. Structure is not revealed till we call in a further element. It follows that we cannot infer time with any certainty from syllables, and that our appreciation of it does not depend on them. There is nothing violent or forced, therefore, in supposing that the time of duple metre may not be always indicated by its words. They may be iambic, and yet not be set to iambic time. The above instance goes far to prove the absolute unimportance of syllables in comparison with rhythm.

In triple time the omission of entire syllables is quite common. In duple, the slower movement hardly allows this to be done without risk; but it easily allows the substitution of a short syllable for a long. My contention is that this involves compensation by pause. It will be remembered that this does not imply actual cessation of voice. It implies only that we recognize something beyond and outside of syllables, supplementing their deficiency. In the crucial case just quoted from Tennyson, we no doubt do actually make a break between each pair of words. This is because oratorical pause (indicated by a comma) happens to coincide with metrical. But the effect is surely no less real when oratorical pause is absent. A line of short or weak syllables produces its effect by contrast with underlying rhythm. In Tennyson's line first quoted,

> The weight of all the hopes of half the world,

vocal utterance need never be suspended, yet the contrast is felt, and produces an impression wholly

different from that of Milton's line. The exact value of this impression may be matter of argument, but all must feel the contrast between lines of slenderer and of fuller syllabification. Yet both admittedly belong to the same metre. Compare other two lines, both taken from Milton:

> Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death.
> "P. L.," II. 621.

> And I shall shortly be with them that rest.
> "S. Ag.," 598.

Can we bring these to a common measure except by recognizing that the first line more entirely occupies time-spaces which equally underlie the second, and by contrast with which the tenuity of the latter produces its designed effect?

It is easy therefore to understand how iambic words may move to even time. Why they are iambic is equally intelligible. Imagine a duple period completely occupied by two such words as "more room" or "own time." Here there is practical equipoise of accent, but that is exceptional; usually one word or other will have stress-predominance. Our poets note this fact, utilize it to mark rhythm, and gratify their ears by making quantity reinforce accent. Hence come real iambs and trochees, which certainly do occur in duple verse, but only at intervals and without connection, thus showing themselves not true units. Whenever they occur they are coupled with fractional pauses; the two together make up the the real unit of structure. This view of our metre seems at once

simple and sufficient, according with and explaining the facts of our verse.

The point has been thus dwelt on because it is indispensable to a right understanding of our verse in any of its divisions. So long as we imagine that syllables indicate time, we attach to them undue importance. Our poets handle syllables with great freedom. "Quantity is loose in all modern verse," say the critics; but it is so for a good reason. Our strong rhythm and punctuating accent enable us to dispense with quantitative recurrence. Syllabic variety contrasted with temporal uniformity creates the charm of English metre, A succession of words like "more room" or "say, Muse" would give remarkably heavy periods. Even a succession of iambs would make heroic verse too monotonous, though at least one English versifier took this as his ideal.[1] Our poets, as a rule, evidently desire nothing of the kind. Their aim is toward freedom and variety. Pope narrowed and artificialized our verse, yet even Pope constantly varies his movement. Other writers, of course, do it far more. By what has been called opposing accent to quantity, but is really opposing both accent and quantity to time, they keep our attention alert, and give elasticity to their metre. There must indeed be a limit to such variation. It must never be carried so far as to crush our sense of rhythm. When syllabic variety overpowers temporal recurrence a line ceases to be metrical. But, short of this, any sort of irregularity—whether in the bulk of syllables,

[1] Richard Glover, "Leonidas" (1737).

or their stress-value, the rate of their succession, their partial or even complete suppression—seems capable of being so handled as to gratify our ears. It is idle, therefore, to expect in syllables any key to the actual structure of verse.

These considerations seem to show what English scansion really means. It cannot mean attaching a definite value to every syllable of every word. That way madness lies. Guest with his twelve hundred and ninety-six possible cadences,[1] Mr. A. J. Ellis (than whom no higher authority can be quoted) with his forty-five different degrees of syllable-prominence,[2] show whither such attempts lead. Fortunately no such task is incumbent on the student of our verse. It is only necessary to determine the time-measure of any particular poem —which in our chief metres should be known already, while in others a poet succeeds only by making it clear—and then to consider, with as much or as little minuteness as he chooses, the way in which syllables correspond to time.

All the excellent work done by many critics in the way of analyzing the mechanism, content, and character of particular lines has its proper place and function. It becomes of the highest value when it is placed in relation to rhythm. But it is still secondary, not primary. The child who "sing-songs" his line has grasped its essential principle,

[1] As before, p. 560.

[2] See Philological Society's "Transactions," 1875-1876, p. 442; or Mayor, as before, Chapter v., where the views of Mr. Ellis are quoted and discussed.

though foolishly emphasizing this at the expense of other elements. The broad lines of scansion are patent and obvious, however delicate and difficult be their application to individual cases. They consist essentially in relating syllables to time.

It will also be evident how futile it is to expect correspondence between the methods of metre and music. Musical notes are almost pure symbols. In theory at least, and no doubt substantially in practice, they can be divided with mathematical accuracy—into fractions of $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{1}{16}$, etc.—and the ideal of music is absolute accordance with time. Verse has other materials and another ideal. Its words are concrete things, not readily carved to such exact pattern. Our poets know this well, and turn it to account. The very stubbornness of their raw material is converted into a grace. Verse and song, as has been said, probably originated together. The earliest form, common to both, may very well have been an inarticulate chant, such as survives slightly modified in the "baloo, balay," or "hey derry down" of popular ballads. But they were soon separated. Neglecting other differences (of pitch, compass, stress, quantitative prolongation, melodic quality), we see that they also differ in their relation to time. The perfection of music lies in absolute accordance with time, that of verse in continual slight departures from time. This is why no musical representations of verse ever seem satisfactory. They assume regularity where none exists. They show syllables as uniform which are really various, and pretend that these keep perfect

time when its imperfection forms part of the charm. On the other hand, to suppose that this imperfection is itself rhythmical — that these aberrations from type, variations of stress and quantity and what not, constitute in themselves the law of verse —would be a still more fatal blunder. Variations are intelligible only by contrast with perfect rhythm, and in studying their nature and limitations it must be remembered that to this contrast they owe their very existence.

General questions have detained us so long, that particular examination of duple rhythm must be reserved for next Chapter. The work, however, that has now been done is done once for all. It will not require repetition for each form of verse. If the principles that have been contended for are real, they apply to all varieties of metre. Their reality will, it is hoped, receive confirmation from subsequent examples. It seemed useless to discuss details of scansion, till the general laws governing scansion were defined. Exaggerated views of the part played by syllables would have rendered true analysis impossible. Variations are not rightly understood till it is known from what they vary. Only now that the basis of duple metre may be assumed as known, can we safely proceed to examine particular instances. But the way is now left clear for such examination.

CHAPTER V

DUPLE METRE (SPECIAL)

THE time-beat of duple metre being determined, we pass on to more particular questions. After time comes accentual notation. When two syllables meet in a period, one usually outweighs the other, and our poets emphasize rhythm by repeating such alternations consecutively. The result is, to put it more precisely, that accentual impact normally rises or falls, increases or diminishes, through each successive period. Duple metre may therefore be divided into *duple rising* and *duple falling* (corresponding to the "iambic" and "trochaic" of our grammars), according as one or other alternation is adopted. But these are really subdivisions of the same metre. Our poets, as has been already noted, pass backwards and forwards from one form to the other at their pleasure. Critics have professed to find different effects in the two types; but in view of this interchangeability such professions must be received with distrust. Others would fain annihilate the distinction by writing both alike. As in music the accented note comes first in a bar, so in verse—they say—the syllable of main accentuation should always begin the period. In itself this latter idea is harmless. Where we place the division-marks matters little, so long as uniformity is

maintained. Marks for distinguishing periods, like lines showing bars in music, are mere aids to the eye. They have no objective existence, in theory; they do not separate units by any space of time, or give them any reality which they did not possess before. There is therefore no real objection to adopting this method, if anyone greatly desires it; but there are circumstances which make it less natural and convenient in metre than in music, as a moment's consideration will show.

English sentences most frequently begin with an unimportant word, such as "And" or "Of" or "The." English lines of verse naturally do the same. So far as the types can be separated, therefore, *rising* metre is immensely more common than *falling*. Why should this fact be left obscure? Why should the less common form be made normal? Why, for example, instead of writing, as everyone would naturally do,

The weight | of all | the hopes | of half | the world,

should we be asked to write,

The | weight of | all the | hopes of | half the | world,

with an odd syllable left forlorn at beginning and end? Imagine every line of Tennyson's "Idylls," every line of "Paradise Lost," treated in this way! Nothing is really gained, for it is just as easy to recognize the syllable of main stress when placed last in a period as when placed first; or, in stricter phrase, to conceive of accentual pressure rising throughout a period as to conceive of it falling. The latter has no monoply of correctness. Undue

insistence on musical analogy, and perhaps some lurking confusion between accent and time—so often confounded, believed inseparable—seem responsible for the pertinacity with which this notation is pressed. Whoever can distinguish accent from time must feel supremely indifferent which method is adopted. The important thing is to realize that time is the same in either notation, that *rising* and *falling* are sub-varieties of one metre. When a poet writes a piece wholly in one or other type, it is convenient to be able to distinguish it by name, and to show it by some difference of marking. What particular device is adopted may be left to taste; the marks do not make verse, only aid us to analyze it. But if one notation be desired applicable to both, it seems more rational to adopt that which represents our usual type of verse, and shows most clearly its component periods. *Rising* metre would then become the normal pattern, and departure from it be shown as omission of initial syllables.

The mere names used of course matter little. Those now suggested (not for the first time) seem clear, intelligible, and not too cumbrous. Single epithets might easily be invented; but why burden English prosody with terms needing explanation and definition? *Duple rising* and *duple falling* carry their own meaning, and show the two types as belonging to one metre. The first word in each name refers to time, the second to accentuation. Similar names will naturally apply to the periods of triple metre.

The number of periods in a line is of course matter for the poet's choice. In duple metre we find a very wide range, from lines of one period (as in Herrick's quaint poem "Upon his departure hence,"[1]

Thus I
Pass by
And die,
As one
Unknown
And gone)

to lines of five, six, seven, and even more. The strong preference of English verse for rising rhythm is particularly shown in five-period lines. That, in the *rising* variety, is the familiar "heroic" line so often mentioned, while its *falling* form is so unusual that Browning wrote "One Word More"[2] in it for the sake of uniqueness:

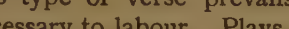
Lines I write the first time and the last time.

This is matter merely of linguistic custom, syntax determining prosody. Other nations have different habits. In Bohemian literature, I understand, *falling* rhythm is as natural as *rising* with us; the metre of "One Word More" is normal, that of "Paradise Lost" exotic. Whichever form be used by our poets, whatever the length of line, and whether it be arranged singly (as in "blank verse") or in couplets or in stanzas, the verse we are considering has one and the same structure, is still set to duple time.

[1] "Hesperides" (1648).
[2] "Men and Women" (1855), last piece.

How widely this type of verse prevails in our poetry it is unnecessary to labour. Plays, ballads, sonnets, didactic and descriptive poems, and not a few of our best songs, exemplify its cadence. For convenience' sake, most examples shall still be taken from lines of "heroic" pattern; but inferences drawn from these apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to all lines based on duple time.

Five periods make a "heroic" line. Its time-structure and normal accentuation may be represented thus:



No particular length of duration is represented by the symbol –, and any other symbol would do as well. But the symbols must be of uniform length one with another. If musical precedent be preferred, the notation would run:

This has the disadvantage of not showing five periods, and so far is less true to fact. But the charm of English metre consists, not in arranging syllables to correspond precisely with this scheme, either as regards time or as regards stress, but in so disposing them that they shall constantly vary from this pattern, yet never disturb our perception of conformity to it. Lines which follow the pattern too closely are tame and mechanical; lines which depart from it too widely relapse into prose. It is a question of ear for the most part, of the writer's ear first, the reader's second. No absolute laws can be laid down. But the possible variations

evidently depend on (1) the number (2) the character of syllables employed.

First, as to *number*. Old critics declared that a heroic line must consist of ten syllables, neither more nor less. By plentiful use of apostrophes and other elision-marks — by writing "t' atone," "th' eternal," and so forth—they sought to make every line in Shakespeare or Milton obey this canon. The eighteenth century saw this delusion at its height, and for a time our verse looked like yielding to fetters. But the genius of our poets rebelled against their critics. Neither historically, nor phonetically, nor critically, was there real foundation for this view. Only at the most artificial epoch of our poetry, and under foreign influence, could such a notion have prevailed. It was conserved in theory, long after it had been abandoned in practice. Fadladeen, the captious critic in Moore's poem,[1] censures the disguised prince for using "exquisite" as a dissyllable; and Guest, in all seriousness, similarly upbraids Wordsworth and Coleridge for so using the word "delicate."[2] No critic now maintains this view. It is universally abandoned. Yet discussions still go on about how many syllables such a line may carry, what and how many "trisyllabic feet" it may contain. The real principle of limitation is not mentioned, either in reprobating the old narrowness

[1] "Lalla Rookh" (1817). See interlude after conclusion of "The Veiled Prophet."

[2] As before, p. 176. Prof. Skeat points out that Guest gradually abandoned his uncompromising opposition to "three-syllable feet."

or discussing modern freedom. A principle, clear in its terms, though elastic in its application, does seem manifestly at work in the pages of our poets; its enunciation will show how futile and unreal discussion of the above points must be.

Absurd as the eighteenth-century view was in itself, it had a glimpse of truth. Words occupying a duple period must be pronounced in the time of that period. To suppose that Shakespeare said "del'cate"[1] is ridiculous; but this is a false deduction from a real fact. The fact is that the word "delicate" can be easily uttered to a duple beat, in the normal time of two syllables; and this gives our principle. Whatever syllables can be so uttered are legitimate. Fixed rules cannot be made, for circumstances alter words. The same syllables will be now admissible, at another time not. The poet is arbiter for himself. He judges which syllables fulfil this condition; we judge if he has judged aright. Mistakes are no doubt made, both by writer and reader. The worst are made when a poet writes by rule instead of ear. Something depends on the listener; a line may be praised by one, condemned by another. But the general principle remains, though writer or reader may misapply it in particular cases. This judgement of syllables is made in respect of time.

What critics like Johnson really sought was to prevent triple time being inserted into duple. A parallel from music seems applicable here. Three crotchets may occupy the time of a minim, if they

[1] This is explicitly maintained by Guest, on the page last referred to.

are bracketed together as "triplets." They are then played in the time of two crochets, music for once departing from its law of absolute time-representation. Precisely analogous seems what is done in verse. A word like "delicate" is pronounced in the time of two syllables, not of three. There is no disruption of time, no mixing up of different times in the same verse. There is therefore no reason to limit the number of such trisyllables. Mr. Swinburne, in the heroic verse of "Marino Falieri" (Act III., Scene 1[1]), writes:

> Thou art older and colder of spirit and blood than I.

Had he chanced to write "than am I," the line would have contained fifteen syllables, and probably no one would have found fault. So far, no reason appears for limiting the discretionary power of a capable singer.

Can a duple period contain *more* than three syllables? It were rash indeed to say *no*. Continually have critics made such assertions, only to find them annihilated by succeeding poets. In this case the question simply means, can four syllables ever be uttered in the time of two? I think instances are not unknown. Some readers will remember a song in Gilbert's opera "Patience," where the last line of each verse runs somewhat thus:

> Why, what a most particularly deep young man this deep young man must be.

The song is clearly in duple metre, as even the

[1] Original edition of 1885, p. 90.

single line quoted is enough to show. And I think it would be difficult to deny that the whole eight syllables in "what a most particularly" are meant to occupy the time of two ordinary feet, and that such rapid delivery of the words is essential to the comedy of this line.[1]

Even in serious poetry, something not unlike this may be found. Observe our poets' use of the word "spiritual." Shakespeare can write at one time:

> Upon our spiritual convocation.
> "King Henry V.," Act I., Sc. 1.

at another:

> And fix'd on spiritual object he shall still.
> "King Henry VIII.," Act III., Sc. 2.

> To steal from spiritual leisure a brief span.
> *Ibid.*

This latter use of the word, compressing it into the time of two syllables, is far from uncommon. Elsewhere Shakespeare has:

> Unreverent Gloster! Thou art reverend
> Touching thy spiritual function, not thy life.
> "First Part of King Henry VI.," Act III., Sc. 1.

Milton follows suit with:

[1] An amusing parody in "Punch" (June 18th, 1902) yields a further example:

> "Why, *what a very singularly* rich old man," etc.

Here the eight italicized syllables must be again crowded into the time of four, with twice repeated effect. The line can be read in no other way.

Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth.
"P. L.," IV. 677.

With spiritual armour able to resist.
Ibid., XII. 491.

while on other occasions he gives the word its fuller sound. Keats perhaps copied these in

Bent his soul fiercely like a spiritual bow.
"Endymion," Book IV.

Tennyson similarly has:

I saw the spiritual city and all her spires.
"Holy Grail."

While in the four-period lines of "In Memoriam" he can write either

Rise in the spiritual rock.
Section 131.

or

But spiritual presentiments.
Section 92.

or, finally,

That lov'd to handle spiritual strife.
Section 85.

thus giving the word equivalence sometimes to four, sometimes to three, sometimes to only two, normal syllabic spaces. This is enough to warn us against making any fixed rule. Naturally, cases will be rare where four syllables are crowded into the time of two, but they are by no means impossible. In analyzing duple verse, therefore, we must not start

with any fixed idea as to the precise number of syllables any line may contain.

Our first question respecting number of syllables has already merged in our *second*, which relates to their character. For the number of syllables which may occupy a line obviously depends on their bulk and weight. Some will flow from the tongue more trippingly than others. Pope has been praised for his line,

> The freezing Tanäis through a waste of snows.
> "Dunciad," Book III.

evidently because the word "Tanäis" runs with such ease to duple time. This line, however, seems no better than many others that might be quoted from the same author, containing a poly-syllable with *i* or *y* in its midst, *e.g.*,

> The sultry Sirius burns the thirsty plains.
> "Pastorals," "Summer."

> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.
> "Essay on Criticism," II.

> Expiate free o'er all this scene of man.
> "Essay on Man," Ep. I.

And, while Pope is particularly fond of words containing this sound (*furious*, *glorious*, *radiant*, *suppliant*, *foliage*, *zodiac*, *Cynthia*, *Delia*, *Parian*, *Latian* are a few instances), his ear taught him to make like use of other words (such as *presumptuous*, *poisonous*, *favourite*, *Danäus*), where the conventional apostrophe equally is but a sign of rapid elocution.

Quantity evidently determined his choice. So in lines of greater complexity, as in Milton's

> Fled over Adria to the Hesperian fields.
> "P. L.," I. 520.

> With dart and javelin, stones and sulphurous fire.
> *Ibid.*, XI. 658.

and still more in later verse, which has recaptured Elizabethan freedom, as when Tennyson writes:

> Ruining along the illimitable inane.
> "Lucretius."

> Myriads of rivulets hurrying thro' the lawn.
> "Princess," § 7, "Come down, O maid."

> Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces.
> "Gareth and Lynette."

or when Mr. Swinburne gives us that line lately quoted:

> Thou art older and colder of spirit and blood than I.

In these and innumerable similar instances it seems certain that time is the governing principle, and quantity the factor dictating suitability.

There are cases, however, not covered by this explanation. When sense is broken, especially midway in a line, our older and our most recent writers sometimes introduce what is called an "extra-metrical syllable," as in these instances from "Macbeth":

> But how of Cawdor? The thane of Cawdor lives.
> Act I., Sc. 3.

Look on 't again I dare not. Infirm of purpose.
Act II., Sc. 2.

Which in his death were perfect. I'm one, my liege.
Act III., Sc. 1.

Hundreds of parallel cases might be quoted, but the very name above given suggests that they scarcely belong to our survey. Such lines are probably not meant to be altogether metrical. Shakespeare's later verse, for instance, seems designedly approximated to prose, perhaps for greater realism. His followers undoubtedly overstepped due bound, and before long comedy at least was frankly written in prose. It is therefore quite arguable that lines like the above are not really metrical. Milton's example rather points that way. In youth he followed Elizabethan precedent, writing, for example, in "Comus":

To quench the drouth of Phœbus, which as they taste.
Line 66.

But for that damn'd magician, let him be girt.
Line 602.

Made goddess of the river; still she retains.
Line 842.

In "Paradise Lost" such lines are conspicuously absent. His maturer taste seems to have rejected such borrowing of prose cadence as unsuited to high and serious, however allowable in dramatic and colloquial, verse. Tennyson's experience seems similar. In early poems we find this form adopted, *e.g.*,

Stole from her sister Sorrow. Might I not tell.
"Gardener's Daughter."

And I repeal it ; and nodding, as in scorn.
"Godiva."

But in his later poems the extra syllable is nearly always slight, fitting easily to the time. Our young poets, therefore, when they introduce a heavy supernumerary syllable in imitation of Shakespeare, should ask themselves what effect it has on the ear. Poetry cannot be written by recipes. In their wish to avoid dullness, they may be in danger of lapsing into prose.

When a line ceases to be rhythmical it ceases to be verse. Mr. Swinburne gives us as a heroic line the following:

Illimitable, insuperable, infinite.
"Elegy," on Burton.[1]

That his ear was conscious of five periods when he wrote this line we need not doubt; but it is not easy for his readers to recognize them. The fourth period seems crowded almost to congestion, and very probably carries four syllables. Of course it is not fair to isolate a line like this. Poems come to us as a whole, and must be so judged. Any individual line may depend for its effect on context and contrast; discord may be introduced of set purpose. But even in isolation this line serves as a test. If any reader, after careful study, fail to hear five periods underlying this line, to him it is not verse. The sense of periodicity is indispens-

[1] "Astrophel and other Poems" (1894), p. 134. The poem is written in quatrains.

able. Metre is here unquestionably strained to its utmost; for some readers it may have been strained even to breaking-point. Rhythmical periods alone constitute metrical character; if they are not felt, the words become simple prose.

A poet is undoubtedly to some extent at the mercy of his readers. They pronounce the verdict, and can but judge as they perceive. New methods, new cadences, take time to be understood. It is always said that a poet has to educate his public. Milton prayed to find "fit audience, though few." Easy verse will always be more popular than that which seeks uncommon effects. This is one reason why we are at a disadvantage in studying foreign verse; subtle shades of meaning and intonation are unperceived. The same applies, of course, to foreign critics of English. On the other hand, verse which leaves no clear impression is so far faulty. Pranks of new writers may demonstrate their authors' incapacity, not their readers' stupidity. General rules are dangerous, but one thing may safely be asserted. Variation is successful only when it brings into relief, not obscures, our perception of underlying uniformity.

To estimate the variations in any particular line, then, we have to study the relation between its syllables and its time. This is work of great delicacy, belonging to the "higher criticism" of verse. The present Chapters aim only at defining a basis for this higher criticism. A few typical instances, however, may be quoted to illustrate the method proposed, and shall be taken from Milton, as our acknowledged

greatest master of legitimate variation. It seems unnecessary to reprint over each line the very simple time-scheme of heroic measure. The reader is asked to carry it in his head, and compare with it the movement of the following lines:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit.
"P. L.," I. 1.

Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire.
Ibid., I. 7.

Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky.
Ibid., I. 45.

O myriads of immortal spirits! O powers.
Ibid., I. 622.

O'er bog or steep, throught strait, rough, dense, or rare,
With heads, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way;
And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.
Ibid., II. 948-950.

And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven.
Ibid., III. 358.

Infinite wrath, and infinite despair.
Ibid., IV. 74.

And corporeal to incorporeal turn.
Ibid., V. 413.

Burned after them to the bottomless pit.
Ibid., VI. 866.

Yet fell. Remember, and fear to transgress.
Ibid., VI. 913.

Silence, ye troubled waves, and, thou Deep, peace.
Ibid., VII. 216.

Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait.
Ibid., VII. 411.

Created thee in the image of God.
Ibid., VII. 527.

Submiss. He reared me, and "Whom thou sought'st, I am."
"P. L.," VIII. 316.

And dust shalt eat all the days of thy life.
Ibid., X. 178,

Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife.
Ibid., X. 198.

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.
Ibid., X. 205.

Me, me only, just object of his ire.
Ibid., X. 936.

By the waters of life, where'er they sat.
Ibid., XI. 79.

Gliding meteorous, as evening mist.
Ibid., XII. 629.

And made him bow to the gods of his wives.
"P. R.," II. 171.

Light from above, from the fountain of light.
Ibid., IV. 289.

Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse.
"S. Ag.," 81.

Out, out, hyaena! these are thy wonted arts.
Ibid., 748.

For his people of old: what hinders now.
Ibid., 1533.

These examples, chosen for freedom from difficulties of pronunciation, show something of the surprising variety which Milton superimposes on a simple time-scheme, without weakening our perception of its absolute and unvarying recurrence.[1]

[1] Many other instances will be found in "Milton's Prosody," by Robert Bridges (latest and fullest edition, 1912). The method of that book ignores time, attends solely to stress, and perhaps too much regards Milton's habits of speech as laws

In some instances, however, the variation is so great as to disturb that perception. Most people find difficulty in reading one or two lines of "Paradise Lost," such as

> Of Lemnos, th' Aegēan isle. Thus they relate.
> I. 746.
>
> Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep.
> III. 586.

It is difficult not to suspect here some change of accent or vocalization. This suspicion, even if unfounded, supports my thesis. It shows that there is a limit of variation beyond which not even Milton may go, and that this limit depends on the character of syllables more than their number. The unlearned reader equally with the expert is conscious of something dubious, can challenge a great poet's judgement, and inquire whether his line has come down to us aright. Surely this proves that the appeal is to simple and natural principles, patent to all of us, though we may not all realize on what issue the appeal is made.

It will now be seen how wide is the field open to the higher critic. Every line of every poet yields material for his analysis. Each great poet has a movement peculiar to himself. Tennyson tells us that each of his "Idylls" was composed to a different music.[1] The intellectual contents of verse,

admitting no exception. But the collection and classification of examples is done with admirable care, and makes the book a treasure-house to the student of verse.

1 "Life," as before, vol. ii., p. 133, note.

its most subtle and delicate refinements of thought or passion, are mirrored in its metre, and must be reckoned with in any complete analysis. An elementary study like this cannot deal with such problems. And it is time we considered the other great branch of English metre, whose phenomena are in some ways even more noteworthy and definite. Light may be reflected from them on the facts of duple verse. Before passing from the latter, however, two points may be mentioned, which have reference alike to its structure and to that of the verse next to be examined.

First, there seems no reason to suppose that every syllable must be wholly within one or another period of a line. In music, a note may be prolonged from one bar into another; in verse, with its much less tractable material, it would be strange if a similar practice did not prevail. Take, for instance, this simple and beautiful line of Shelley's:

The one remains, the many change and pass.[1]

Orthodox prosody divides this into five feet, bisecting the word "many," but such bisection (though in itself quite legitimate) seems in this case to caricature the movement of the line. Reformers like Prof. Skeat, again, would divide the line thus:

The one | remains, | the many | change | and pass.

This is the natural prose grouping of the words, but it fails to show what makes them metrical. Shall we assume a pause before "change," the division

[1] "Adonäis," stanza 52.

otherwise being as above, and the fourth period being filled out by this pause into equality with the others? This would be a good enough line, but not perhaps exactly Shelley's. Had he written

The one remains, the many depart and pass.

it would have been clear enough that "the many" must occupy the third period; but it seems equally clear that it is not so in the real line, whose "dying fall" seems incompatible with such movement. The true explanation is surely that suggested by the opening words of this paragraph. That a metrical pause does precede the word "change" I make no doubt; but it does not follow that it covers the whole time of a syllable. The second syllable of "many" may be on the boundry-line between the third and fourth periods, not to be assigned definitely to either. Our poets, ever seeking variety, ever studious to obtain slight contrasts between syllables and time, will naturally try this method among others. To suppose that they cannot is a legacy from the dead doctrine of syllabic feet. To me at least the above view seems both plausible and rational, and if accepted it will be found applicable to very many cases in all types of metre.

The *second* point is more speculative. Some theorists teach that the unit of metre must be a *double foot*, containing action and reaction, systole and diastole. Coventry Patmore, in the essay before mentioned (p. 242), lays this down with all the confidence of Newton affirming the law of gravitation. The idea is attractive, since rhythm is certainly a

kind of pulsation. But from this Patmore and others draw the astonishing inference that no line of duple metre containing an odd number of periods can be complete in itself, but must in every case be followed by an entire period of silence. Our heroic line must therefore contain six periods, of which the last is normally blank. This seems wild theory indeed. No doubt every perfect line is followed by a pause. The very name *verse* (from *versus*, "a turning") implies some such pause as is involved in stopping and beginning afresh. Into this pause, I imagine, is projected the redundant syllable which sometimes ends an heroic line, as when Milton writes:

> Of rebel angels, by whose aid as*piring*.
> "P. L.," I. 38.[1]

This same pause gives weight to the weakest final syllable, so that in this line,

> White, black, and gray, with all their trumpery.
> "P. L.," III. 475.

no "rhythmical accent" whatever need be assumed to rest on the last syllable of "trumpery." But to

[1] This cadence is comparatively rare in Milton, rare in Tennyson's mature poetry, common in dramatic and colloquial verse. Sometimes two syllables are so projected, as in Milton's "For solitude sometimes is sweet *society*" ("P. L.," IX., 249); but then the syllables are always short, practically equal to one ordinary syllable. What was said of redundant syllables in the middle of a line seems to apply to final ones also, though the latter are naturally less obtrusive and therefore more inoffensive.

suppose that this pause is definite or metrical, still more that it covers a whole period, is pure assumption. If our view of duple verse be correct, the assumption is needless. Every duple period, containing two equal parts, has in itself action and reaction, systole and diastole. A single such period can therefore stand by itself, as we saw in an instance from Herrick; and our heroic line is stable in itself, without any imaginary additions. Not every line printed as verse is complete in itself, as we shall see in the next Chapters; were this theory applied to triple time it might have more likelihood. But it seems manifestly untrue of the metre of "Paradise Lost," and its untruth confirms our view of that metre. It is because that metre moves to duple or even, not to iambic, time, that it is stable, self-poised, self-complete; and the same description would seem to hold good of all lines in duple measure, irrespective of their length.

CHAPTER VI

TRIPLE METRE

VERSE of triple-time measure fills small place in our early prosodies. Commonly styled or coupled with "tumbling verse," it was regarded as an inferior type, useful for comic purposes. James VI. of Scotland, in his "Short Treatise" (1585),[1] describes it as fit only for "flyting." Throughout the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, it was still deemed of secondary importance, appropriate to "Bath Guides" and poems about haunches of venison, or at best expressing semi-serious tones of artificial feeling:

> I have found out a gift for my fair,
> I have found where the wood-pigeons breed.[2]

The great revival of romance and poetry toward the end of the latter century put new life into many forms of verse, especially into those that move to this measure. But it was reserved for the nineteenth century, and for its Victorian era in particular, to vindicate fully the rights of triple-time verse. Tennyson and the Brownings, Rossetti

[1] "Essays of a Prentice in the Divine Art of Poesie" (1585). (Reprint by Prof. Arber 1869).

[2] Shenstone (William), "Pastoral Ballad" (1737?).

and Morris, Mr. Swinburne, and many of less note, have revolutionized our notions of its capability. It is known now as an equal of its elder brother, adequate to all themes, and possessing charm and flexibility peculiar to itself. Some even think that the future of English poetry belongs especially to this type of verse. As least there can be no doubt that it challenges attention, and deserves more careful consideration than it has received. Its bolder features and more strongly marked rhythm make analysis of its structure especially interesting.

Yet, strange to say, this rhythm is constantly mistaken. The names *dactyl* and *anapaest* are responsible for the error. How often we see the first line of Longfellow's "Evangeline" scanned thus:

– ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ – ◡
This is the | forest prim- | eval, the | murmuring | pines and
◡ – –
the | hemlocks.

Probably the writer states that the marks denote accentuation, not length; but the time is never explained, and readers naturally suppose it to be that which these marks indicate. In reality, the time is more like this:

◡ ◡ ◡ | ◡ ◡ ◡ | ◡ ◡ ◡ | ◡ ◡ ◡ | ◡ ◡ ◡ | ◡ ◡ ◡ ;

one time-space in the last period being left without an equivalent syllable. Tribrachs, accented on the first syllable, represent the time better than dactyls. I do not suppose that any competent critic really doubts this. He knows that the movement is to

triple time, and he knows that real dactyls and anapaests are incompatible with triple time. But he is accustomed to ignore time in English verse, accustomed to think only of syllables and their stresses, and he uses familiar marks to express these last without thinking of the confusion caused thereby. Hopeless confusion is caused, and I believe it will surprise most English readers—ladies, perhaps, more than others—to be told that the time of Longfellow's line is quite different from that of Greek or Latin hexameter verse.

As duple time consists of two equal beats, so triple time consists of three. Conclusions reached by analysis of verse set to the former time hold good with verse set to the latter, and need only be recapitulated briefly. Syllables do not correspond precisely to beats. They do not keep perfect time, likes notes of music, but the time itself is unvarying. On this background of rhythm our poets weave tracery-work of dactyls and anapaests. Such feet do exist in our verse, in the real not the metaphorical sense, but they occur casually, and are not its true units. They are due to a supplementing of accent by quantity. Periods are the actual units, and the way to scan a poem is to discover its time-measure, and then consider the relation of syllables to time. Words and parts of words, their stresses and quantities, are less important than rhythm; syllables need not always be contained wholly in a particular period. Such were the results of our inquiry into duple metre, and the same results may be taken as holding good in triple. Besides these,

there are others to be noted as specially applying to the latter type of verse.

The beat of triple metre is so marked that syllables can be dropped with greater ease, and pauses are longer and of more frequent occurrence. Lines can be run into each other with freedom, the rhythm sufficiently distinguishing structure. The best way to illustrate both these points is by example, and Browning's first "Cavalier Song," referred to in an early Chapter,[1] will answer the purpose. I take the first two stanzas, writing them as continuous verse, place the time-notation above, and asking the reader to notice for himself where lines end, what time-beats have no corresponding syllable, and to what extent stress or quantity reproproduces temporal uniformity. No particular length of time is indicated by the symbol used; relative uniformity is the one and only postulate. The sign adopted (◡) is chosen as to some extent suggesting the actual movement, but not as in any way related to that used in duple metre. No comparison between the two metres is at present intended.

◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
Kentish Sir | Byng | stood for his | King, | Bidding
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
the | crop-headed | Parliament | swing; And, | pressing a
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
| troop un- | able to | stoop And | see the rogues | flourish
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
and | honest folk | droop, | Marched them a- | long, |
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
fifty-score | strong, | Great-hearted | gentlemen, | singing
◡ ◡ ◡ ◡
this | song.' ‖

[1] *Ante*, p. 12.

God for King | Charles! | Pym and such | carles To
the | Devil that | prompts 'em their | treasonous | parles!
| Cavaliers, | up! | Lips from the | cup, | Hands
from the | pasty, nor | bite take nor | sup. Till you're |
marching a- | long, | fifty-score | strong, | Great-
hearted | gentlemen, | singing this | song. ||

It will be seen that the time-structure is constant throughout. I assume a break after each stanza. Any reader, following the natural swing of the lines, will find that he pauses at the places shown blank, and instinctively allows silence to compensate for absent sound. Time-measure is thus the basis. Syllables, on the other hand, seem pitchforked into their places with little care and less uniformity. *Feet*, in any sense, of the term, are the exception rather than the rule. How can "see the rogues," "fifty-score," "great-hearted" be accounted *dactyls?* To call them so is to give up all attempt at reality, and reduce metre to chaos. No, it is the very absence of uniformity in syllables which forms the chief note of our verse, and that is even more patent here than in duple metre. Syllables do not keep accurate time, and do not succeed each other with uniformity sufficient to constitute *feet*. The real uniformity is one of time, and it is a uniformity actual, palpable, measurable.

It may be said that this is exceptionally rough verse. Browning is not metrically a prophet of

smooth things, and often strains his measure. But his irregularity brings into stronger light the fundamental regularity conditioning his utterance. Time is maintained unbroken throughout, though sometimes one syllable, sometimes two, occupy part or all of the more normal silence. A later verse begins from a superfluous syllable:

Then, | God for King | Charles ! |.

As a pause must separate the stanzas, it is easy to understand how this word "Then" finds room for itself; it forms a real case of *anacrusis*.[1] The space which it occupies is, so to say, filched from the indefinite separating interval. Scansion by time is here shown revealing structure otherwise indiscernible; and the structure so revealed is evidently the real basis.

This dovetailing of lines into each other was rightly recognized by Poe in his clever if untrustworthy paper, "The Rationale of Verse,"[2] though he strangely omits to draw the natural inference that a time-space is occasionally left blank of words. Syllable-structure in the piece he quotes happens to be exceedingly regular, the only obvious blank spaces coming occasionally at the end of lines. Had he pressed analysis further, he must have seen that

[1] Cf. *ante* p. 9.

[2] "Works of Edgar Allan Poe," edited by Ingram (1875), vol. iii. The reference is to his analysis of a well-known passage from Byron's "Bride of Abydos," beginning "Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime." Poe's paper has many features worth study.

such blanks occur in other parts of the line, and this might have suggested a method of scansion more sound than his wild notions of quantity led him to formulate. For, while some poets delight to give three syllables to every period of triple time, others almost habitually give less. A single instance of the latter must suffice, and will further illustrate the relations assumed by syllables to underlying time.

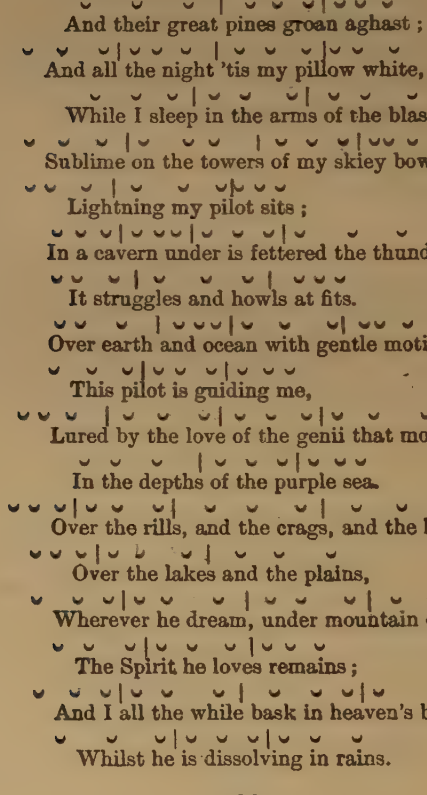
Shelley's "Cloud" is a poem in *triple rising* metre, alternate lines comprising *four* periods and *three*.[1] Occasionally the lines have their full complement of syllables, *e.g.*,

Like a child | from the womb, | like a ghost | from the tomb, |
I arise | and unbuild | it again.

Here the time is obvious, because syllables exemplify it pretty closely. But the same time pervades the poem, a fact disguised from us only by pauses not being printed as well as syllables. A specimen verse is submitted in proof of this, the bar-marks being restricted to time, and the lines left separate, to show with what freedom metre is handled. Incessant as the variations are, they never seem to destroy our perception of rhythm; the underlying cadence is heard through all changes. One's ear is conscious of something beyond syllables—something which marshals them in temporal order, supplements them

[1] The second and fourth lines of the first verse are shorter —two periods instead of three—as if the poet had not yet chosen his metre. I have therefore taken the second verse for analysis, as better revealing metrical pattern.

when exiguous, accelerates them when heavy. This something is the time-measure to which they are set, itself unchanging, whose regularity is but emphasized by their diversity.


I sift the snow on the mountains below,
And their great pines groan aghast;
And all the night 'tis my pillow white,
While I sleep in the arms of the blast.
Sublime on the towers of my skiey bowers
Lightning my pilot sits;
In a cavern under is fettered the thunder,
It struggles and howls at fits.
Over earth and ocean with gentle motion
This pilot is guiding me,
Lured by the love of the genii that move
In the depths of the purple sea.
Over the rills, and the crags, and the hills,
Over the lakes and the plains,
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream,
The Spirit he loves remains;
And I all the while bask in heaven's blue smile,
Whilst he is dissolving in rains.

Readers will notice for themselves how free is the movement of these lines, how bold the handling of stress and quantity. Syllabic bulk sometimes aids effect, as in the words "great pines groan." More often pause is frankly relied on, as in the very next line to this:

And all | the night.

This free use of pause gives spirit to the metre.[1] One is tempted to lay down a principle, to say that fully syllabized verse, where words represent rhythm and can be checked off on the fingers, belongs to tame and conventional poetry, of such eighteenth century type as

> At the close of the day, when the hamlet is still,
> And mortals the sweets of forgetfulness prove;[2]

while the greater freedom of verse like Shelley's, with its vigorous use of metrical pause, came in with our new poetry of romantic passion. The idea may not be wholly false, but it must not be exalted into a canon. The same poets use both forms. Next before the "Cloud" in some editions of Shelley comes a piece headed "A Vision of the Sea," whose four-period lines nearly always contain their full tale of syllables:

> 'Tis the terror of tempest. The rags of the sail
> Are flickering in ribbons within the fierce gale.

This is the same time as the longer lines of the

[1] Readers doubting this analysis are referred to some further remarks in Chapter vii. (pp. 114-115).

[2] Beattie, "The Hermit."

"Cloud," but how different the effect! Fuller syllabification creates an impression of haste, of being hurried along without power to stop. We should rather say that here we have two patterns of verse, from either or both of which a poet can draw rich music. Comparison of syllables with time teaches us to discriminate the two. Our last great original singer, Mr. Swinburne, specially favours the line of full syllabism, and his wonderful command of quantity enables him to do this without loading or congesting his line. Critics who glorify one of these types of verse at the other's expense show that they have yet to learn the laws of their art. One of these is to analyze, but never prophesy; to register results, but be chary of attempting to legislate. New writers bring new methods, and Poetry is apt to be justified of her children.

Both these specimens were in *rising* metre.[1] The division between *rising* and *falling* is, if possible, even more shadowy in triple than in duple metre. Poets pass freely from one to the other. Thus Mr. Swinburne's "Hesperia"[2] opens with falling cadence,

Out of the golden remote wild West . . .

while the very next line of similar pattern begins:

As a wind sets in with the Autumn . . .

How futile to regard these as separate metres! To

[1] *Triple rising*, of course, corresponds to so-called "anapaestic" measure, *triple falling* to so-called "dactylic."

[2] "Poems and Ballads" (1866).

discuss whether the metre of this poem be dactylic or anapaestic is mere loss of time. It is either or both, according as the poet has engrafted feet of these patterns on the essential underlying rhythm. To my ear, even such lines as the following,

> From the bountiful infinite West, from the happy memorial places
> Full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the dead, . . .

convey much more of a dactylic than of an anapaestic impression. The question is of little moment, since both are cadences of one metre. Is there any fundamental difference between

> Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in prison, . . .

and

> As the cross that a wild nun clasps till the edge of it bruises her bosom?

Surely they are lines of the same structure, differing only because the first starts from a pause and the second fills up that pause with syllables. Previous analysis otherwise explains the measure. At any rate the lines quoted in this paragraph exemplify to perfection Mr. Swinburne's magical command of words, and his ability to fill every period with syllables and yet neither overweight nor hurry his verse.

Why have only two subdivisions been given in triple metre, *rising* and *falling?* Why not a third, in which the signalizing stress shall rest on the mid-syllable of three? This collocation, whose analogy

would be with the Classic *amphibrach*, is one of Prof. Skeat's four units. It is undoubtedly common in our speech, therefore presumably in our verse, but for some reason our metrists object to recognizing it as an English "foot." The looseness of our syllable-structure and the uncertainty of our accentuation enable them always to propound another alternative. Thus in Milton's line,

> By day a cloud, by night a pillar of fire.
>
> "P. L.," XII. 203.

it would seem natural to assign "a pillar" to the *fourth* period, but it is possible to contend that the proper division is

> a pil- | lar of fire,

making an anapaest of the last foot.[1] So also with Tennyson's phrase previously quoted,

> the rapid of life,

and innumerable other instances. Why there should be this unwillingness to recognize an *amphibrach* does not appear. Personally, I have no doubt that the collocation of syllables loosely described by this name does occur in a period. Many lines, moreover, seem at first sight written to this cadence, such as this of Browning's:

[1] This, however, clashes with the doctrine of other prosodists, that the last foot of a line must never be trisyllabic! Such are the self-created difficulties that attend mere theorizing. As a matter of fact, there can be little doubt that both the phenomena denied occur in our verse; one or other of them must be accepted in the above instance.

I galloped, | Dirck galloped, | we galloped | all three ;[1]

or this of Mr. Swinburne's:

The laurel, | the palms, and | the paean, | the breast of | the nymphs in | the brake.[2]

But an examination of the poems from which these lines are taken will show that the effect is accidental. A dropped syllable at the beginning is responsible for it. Of course dactyls, amphibrachs, and anapaests are interchangeable if syllables may be dropped. Omit one syllable from the beginning of a dactylic line, and you make amphibrachs of all feet except the last; omit two, and you make dactyls. This is true in Classic verse; it is equally true in English, applied to time-beats instead of syllables. But there is this difference, that our freedom of dropping a syllable makes the three varieties seldom long distinguishable. Even the two main effects, of falling or rising stress, blend and alternate; to constitute a third type seems wholly unnecessary. Logically, it would complete the division, and should a poem ever appear containing lines of this pattern only it might be desirable to do it, though even then the metre might as easily be called *triple rising* with the first syllables always omitted. Practically, such lines occur only casually and infrequently; and to give them a separate name would appear to create unnecessary complication.

[1] "How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix."

[2] "Hymn to Proserpine" ("Poems and Ballads," 1886).

Can a triple-time period carry more than three syllables? The analogy of duple metre suggests that it can, provided the syllables are such as fit easily into the time of that period. But, as only one "accented" syllable usually goes to a period, this is tantamount to saying that three "unaccented" syllables may come together—which, as we have seen, metrists declare impossible or disastrous. Not stopping to correct rather vague phraseology, I would suggest that the phenomenon so described must be held far from uncommon in our verse, unless impossible elisions are assumed. Poe quotes from an American writer,

> *Many are the* thoughts that come to me,

and no one now would say that the words italicized contain less than four syllables, of which the first alone can in any sense be described as "accented." Similar collocations are not very rare. In "Ulalume," Poe himself has

> The leaves they were *withering and* sere.
> Our talk had been *serious and* sober.
> Our *memories were treacherous and* sere.
> She *revels in a* region of sighs.
> See, it *flickers up the* sky through the night.

(Secondary accent certainly occurs in some of these, but metrical stress is on the first syllable only.) A previous quotation from Shelley gives:

> The rags of the sail
> Are *flickering in* ribbons within the fierce gale.

Browning, in his "Pheidippides,"[1] abolishes the second stress of "gloriously," writing:

> *Gloriously*, as he began,
> So to end *gloriously*.

Swinburne, in the early "Hymn to Proserpine" before quoted, used this cadence in:

> The roses grew *rosier*, *and* bluer the sea-blue stream of the bays;

and it occurs often in his later verse. Compare

> A land that is *lonelier than* ruin.
> "By the North Sea," I. 1.[2]
>
> But reefs the blood-*guiltiest of* murder.
> *Ibid.*, I. 7.
>
> A land that is *thirstier than* ruin,
> A sea that is *hungrier than* death.
> *Ibid.*, IV. 5.
>
> The *slayer and the stayer and the* harper, the light of us all and our lord.
> "Offshore."[2]

These examples cannot be disposed of by saying that the italicized words or parts of words are to be reckoned trisyllables; they are genuine instances of four syllables pronounced in the normal time of three. Metrically, they form one monopressure, though in ordinary speech some of them would involve two. They seem decisive against the crudely expressed theory which forbids "three unaccented

[1] "Dramatic Idylls," first series, 1879.
[2] "Studies in Song," 1880.

syllables" to come together, and even against Prof. Skeat's more carefully worded opinion. While it might be difficult to say that in each of these examples the italicized syllables occupy one period, it is clear that there is nothing to prevent such an occurrence, and certain that our poets do in cases like this set four syllables to the usual time-measure of three. When two such collocations come consecutively, as in the last instance, four syllables obviously must be contained in a single period.

The analogy of duple metre further suggests that, on rare ocasions, even more than four syllables may be crowded into a triple period. It would be dangerous to pronounce this impossible. But the limits of monopressure would certainly make it a somewhat difficult feat. Questions present themselves connected with this, which will need discussion in a fresh chapter. They concern the extensibility of rhythm, and the possibility of metres based on other than duple and triple time. Of verse set to the latter a general account has now been given, and its further examination must be left to the higher critic. The problems it presents are well worth his study, and should be handled to greater advantage when related to a true basis. Their proper solution is incompatible with the idea that our "three-syllable metres" move to common time.

CHAPTER VII

QUADRUPLE METRE, ETC.

Do duple and triple rhythm cover between them the whole compass of English verse? Music has rhythms of greater complexity; is it so with metre? The question, here as elsewhere, is not one of theory but of fact. Evidently verse has conditions peculiar to itself. Limits of articulation and accentuation make themselves felt. Since stress-pressure usually culminates but once in a period, and more than three syllables are rarely included in such mono-pressure, the difficulties of adapting words to quadruple measure must be very great, to yet more extended periods almost insuperable. If secondary pressure come in, time will be imperfectly signalized, and rhythm become doubtful. So much is clear, but the question remains—have our poets tried to overcome these difficulties? This can be answered only by examination of instances.

The difficulties are illustrated by those phrases which were quoted in the penultimate paragraph of last Chapter. Such words as "many are the" cannot easily be compressed into a single period; they tend to split into two pairs, "many . . . are the." "Gloriously" is apt to have secondary stress on its third syllable. "Revels in the" and "flickers

up the" show the disintegrating process further advanced; it needs an effort to keep them within one rhythmical unit. Given a line wholly composed of such units, the effort would become considerable. A quadruple period will only too easily separate into two duple periods, both being forms of common time. We may be prepared, therefore, to find some vagueness and uncertainty of effect, supposing the experiment to have been tried.

Lanier quotes three examples,[1] seemingly with no doubt of their measure. One is:

Wistfully she | wandered o'er the | desert of the | waters;

another:

The | rose was new in | blossom, and the | sun was on the | hill.

(I give these in his notation.) A third is humorous:

An | entertaining | history, en- | titled, "Saul, a | Mystery,"
Has | recently been | published by the | Reverend Arthur | Coxe.

These are held to carry the main accent on the first syllable of each period. A more usual form may seem to carry it on the third, as in Browning's

At the midnight, | in the silence | of the sleep-time, |
When you see your | fancies free . . .[2]

With this compare an earlier piece by the same writer:[3]

1 "Science of English Verse," pp. 126-129, 229, 232.
2 "Asolando," last poem.
3 "A Toccata of Galuppi's."

Oh, Galuppi, | Baldassaro, | this is very | sad to find;

or Tennyson's line in the "Revenge": [1]

We will make the | Spaniard promise, | if we yield, to | let us go.

Each of the last three examples, of course, has a dropped syllable at the end; and Mrs. Browning seems to use a similar cadence, with twice-repeated omission, in

To the belfry, | one by one, | went the ringers | in the sun; [2]

which precisely recalls the structure of her husband's

On the sea and | at the Hague, | sixteen hundred | ninety-two. [3]

Mrs. Browning also gives us lines without omitted syllables, as in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship":

There are none of | England's daughters | who can show a | prouder presence;

or this from "The Cry of the Children":

Do you hear the | children weeping, | O my brothers?

Further instances will present themselves to my readers' memory. I add one from an unpublished piece, which seems as apposite as any of the above:

[1] "The Revenge: a Ballad of the Fleet."
[2] "Rhymè of the Duchess May."
[3] "Hervé Riel."

There's Mildewan | and Pitewan | and the Burnside | of
Inshewan;
There's the house of | Balmakewan; | West and East and
| Middle Drums;
On the coast we | have the Slainges— | through the shire
| a lot of Granges,
And the city | that is known un- | to the uni- | verse as
"Thrums."

Are such verses really written to quadruple time? Before answering we should properly examine the poems from which they are taken. The effect may be accidental, a slight and temporary deviation from typical structure. But, even regarded by themselves, can it be said that they are beyond doubt? In each and all secondary accent shows a strong tendency to appear, and in very few would it be difficult to recognize units of duple rhythm. Does any of them, for instance, differ substantially from this other line of Browning's:

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated, learnt
and taught . . . ?

Yet this last comes from a poem—"La Saisiaz"—quite manifestly written in *duple falling* metre, the metre of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."

Some of Mr. Kipling's metres seem to aim at quadruple time. "The Last Chantey"[1] might pass for *triple falling* at first sight:

Loud sang the | souls of the | jolly jolly | mariners;

but the words "jolly jolly" prepare us for a different time-measure, fully syllabized in such rapid lines as:

[1] "The Seven Seas" (1896), p. 21.

Nay, but we were | angry, and a | hasty folk are | we.
If we | worked the ship to- | gether till she | foundered in foul | weather,
Are we | babes that we should | clamour for a | vengeance on the | sea?

(Observe how these lines dovetail.) Similar time seems used in other poems, but disguised by a larger element of pause, *e.g.*,

Fair is our | lot, O | goodly is our | heritage.[1]

Coast-wise, | cross-seas, | round the world and | back again.[2]

Well, ah | fare you well, for the | Channel wind's took | hold on us.[3]

This is fine swinging measure, but whether rightly styled quadruple may be open to question. The last-cited line has a peculiarity which, perhaps, sheds light on its character. Note the extra syllable so cunningly squeezed into its second period. Now substitute for "fare" any such rapid dissyllable as "merry"—sound, not sense, being under discussion—which can be uttered in the same time as the monosyllable it replaces. We should then have a period comprising *six* syllables, which could not possibly be embraced in one monopressure. That a quadruple period should carry six syllables is no more remarkable than that a duple should carry three; but it seems fatal to its ranking as a unit. If a unit can be divided it is no longer a unit. The tendency here to divide into two parts would be

[1] "The Seven Seas" p. 1 ("A Song of the English").
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 30 (in "The Merchantmen").
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 94 (in "Anchor Song").

irresistible; the six syllables would obviously constitute not one quadruple but two duple units. Now, the time is the same in either case, whether four syllables or six be carried, and time is what constitutes metre. It seems, therefore, to follow that, with whatever number of syllables occupied, the time underlying this verse is not really quadruple, but only wears a semblance of being so.[1]

Probably the truth is that any metre greater than triple, like any Greek foot of more than three syllables, is resoluble into simpler units. This does not prevent its lending a character to verse. Greek choriambic metre produces an effect of its own, though its units as commonly understood are not real units but compound. Quadruple effects may similarly be obtained in our verse by what is really a composition of duple periods. If sextuple metre were ever attempted, with such a unit as, for instance, the word "variability," the latter's manifest capacity of severance into two triple periods would probably prevent it from making any single impression. Music recognizes quintuple and septuple rhythm; but it is difficult to see how either could be adopted for verse. I know of no lines—even single ones—which can be supposed to exemplify either. If such verse were ever produced, the notation is ready to receive it. At present it would seem that duple and triple rhythm divide between them the whole realm of English poetry, quadruple effects being also in some cases attempted. The latter, however, do not

[1] I incline now to think that quadruple metre holds a more definite place in recent verse than the above paragraph admits.

constitute a real separate measure, and can always in the last analysis be resolved into duple time.

Such superimposed effects are frequent in English verse. We have seen that iambs and trochees find place in duple, dactyls and anapaests in triple rhythm. Subtler effects are also possible. Here is a not very remarkable line of heroic verse:

Fears of the brave and follies of the wise.[1]

Repeat this structure as closely as possible in successive lines, and its cadence will produce an impression of its own. Arrange such lines in quatrains, with dissyllabic ending of odd lines and monosyllabic of even, and the result may be something like this:

Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet-call,—
Oh to save these! to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all![2]

This metre, used throughout a pretty long poem, gives quite the effect of a separate and peculiar measure, and is often so regarded. Yet comparison with Johnson's line seems to show that its apparent peculiarity comes from incessant repetition of what in a solitary instance would pass without notice. Relax the insistency of this rhythm and the line resumes its ordinary effect, *e.g.*,

What can we do, o'er whom the unbeholden
Hangs in a night with which we cannot cope?
What but look sunward, and with faces golden
Speak to each other softly of a hope?[3]

---

[1] Johnson, "Variety of Human Wishes," line 316.
[2] F. W. H. Myers, "St. Paul," p. 34. [3] *Ibid*, p. 14.

This ranks with ordinary "heroic" measure. The effect produced by the quatrain first quoted depends partly on its initial dactyl, partly on the unequal division of syllables throughout periods. It may be noted that it is almost identical with that produced by our reading of certain lines supposed to be in Classic measure, such as Canning's:

Needy knife-grinder, whither are you going?[1]

or the more serious attempt of a obscurer critic:

Yet with my charmer fondly will I wander.[2]

This structure will be further analyzed in the Appendix. It was certainly bold to set a cadence of this kind to the familiar time-spaces of our best-known measure, but the poet's ear is justified by the result, unavoidable monotony being the one apparent blemish on a measure which must be deemed beautiful and satisfactory in itself.

In triple metre, a not uncommon effect—due evidently to our habit of speech—is produced by letting the first and third syllables in a period outweigh the second. This results in a cadence whose analogue would be the Classic foot "amphimacer," exactly reversing that other which has been noted as comparable to the "amphibrach." Such cadence is exemplified in Moore's line,

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,[3]

---

1 "Anti-Jacobin" (1797).

2 Herries, John, "The Elements of Speech" (London, 1773), p. 186.

3 "Irish Melodies."

the rhythm of which has been not inaptly paralleled with that of an ordinary French heroic line. It would usually be scanned as consisting of "anapaests," but the fallacy of this has been already exposed. That foot, in Greek verse, moves to common time, and its use to denote a triple period is misleading. Besides, only a Boeotian ear could regard these as anapaests, even in the metaphorical sense. They have a not unpleasing rhythm of their own, quite different from that of any of the Greek feet mentioned in this paragraph. But it is a more or less accidental and temporary effect merely, due to the propensity of our language for accenting alternate syllables, and the base on which it is superimposed—as an examination of the entire poem readily shows—is triple rising metre.

In all such cases the important fact to remember is that syllabic structure only, not time, is modified by these conspicuous variations. Striking as they are, and prominent as syllabic value necessarily is in our verse, the ultimate appeal is to something yet deeper, yet more fundamental. What astonishing syllabic variety can be superimposed on simple times has been noted in previous pages. To many readers, doubtless, the syllabic variety will seem more important than the temporal uniformity. But the two are blent in our verse, and the former takes its whole meaning and content from the latter. Complexities of metre, we have seen reason to believe, depend on contrast between these two elements. With this reassertion of basic principle I pass on to other phases of our subject.

The number of periods customarily constituting triple lines was not discussed in last chapter, being reserved for mention here, in connection with wider issues. Three, four, and six are the commonest numbers, illustrated by Cowper's:

I am out of humanity's reach,
I must finish my journey alone;[1]

Byron's:

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold:[2]

Swinburne's:

For the breath of the face of the Lord that is felt in the bones of the dead.[3]

These are in rising rhythm, but the same applies to falling. The longest triple line known to me—perhaps the very longest real line in serious English verse—occurs in Tennyson's latest volume,[4] in the poem "Kapiolani":

Dance in a fountain of flame with her devils, or shake with her thunders and shatter her island.

This, it will be seen, contains no fewer than eight periods. The shortest triple lines, I think, contain two periods, as in Hood's "One more Unfortunate":

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care . . .

---

1 "Minor Poems," "Alexander Selkirk."

2 "Hebrew Melodies."

3 "Poems and Ballads" (1866), "A Song in Time of Revolution."

4 "Oenone and other Poems" (1892). This same volume

It is an interesting question, pertinent to Patmore's contention cited at the end of Chapter v., whether triple lines can consist of one period only. Of course we could write Hood's lines in that form:

Take her up
Tenderly,
Lift her with
Care—

and very odd it would look, since our printing does not show the pauses which supplement the monosyllable "care." This would be typography merely, not prosody. The prosodial question is, what determines the length of a line?

Not every line printed as such is a real line of verse. We may write either:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, the furrow
followed free;
We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea—

or, as these words are usually printed in the "Ancient Mariner," arranged in four lines of common "ballad

contains more than one instance of his longest real line of duple verse, first used in lines titled "Virgil," and never more finely than in these which close his last gift to us:

Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human
state,
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of the Being who alone is
great,
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent watcher at
the gate.

But the *nine* periods of this duple verse cannot be held equal in length to the *eight* triple periods of the line quoted above.

measure"; or, finally, divided into six lines of shorter length, four containing four syllables and the others six, which is the form adopted sometimes for other poems in precisely this metre. Is it matter of indifference, or of caprice? If we heard the poem instead of reading it, should we know where the lines end? Or is there no principle involved, and may the printer exercise his choice in the arrangement?

Final rhyme of course yields no such principle, since some lines do not rhyme at all, while others have rhyme elsewhere than at the end. We cannot say that

> The fair breeze blew,
> The white foam flew,

or

> To the belfry, one by one,
> Came the singers in the sun,

are separate lines because of their rhyme. Midway and other rhymes are often found, notably in Browning's "The worst of it" and "Dîs aliter visum." [1] Final rhyme, no doubt, accentuates to our ear the termination of a line, but it does not cause termination.

A poem is in itself a whole, but either author or printer usually divides it into lines for our convenience in reading. There is no law to prevent their doing so as they please, and often one sees curious arrangements which have no real signifi-

[1] "Selections," as before, pp. 209, 213.

cance. With these we need not concern ourselves. The true point is, supposing a poem came to us without division at all, could we for ourselves arrange it into lines—would these reveal themselves as the units of rhythm do, while we read or listen?

If so, it can be only in virtue of their being necessarily followed by a pause. Nothing else will avail to discriminate them. And the first answer must be that only such lines are true units, all others being merely matter of convenience. In triple verse, as we have seen, many lines obviously run and dovetail into each other. Such verse possesses no real line, and it is immaterial in most cases how the division is made on paper. In "Take her up tenderly, lift her with care," there seems no real stop till the word "care" is reached; the words form one rhythmical line. Therefore triple verse of one period is never used; it would be too manifest a distortion of fact. One period of *uneven time* has no stability, and cannot form a real unit, even if printed as such. And even triple lines of three periods are usually read in pairs, making them virtually one line of six periods.

When the pause at the end of a line is due to a dropped syllable, there may still be no finality. Thus in

> Britannia needs no bulwarks,
> No towers along the steep;
> Her march is o'er the mountain-waves,
> Her home is on the deep,[1]

[1] Campbell, "Ye Mariners of England."

it can hardly be doubted that the first line is identical in length with the third, a pause replacing the eighth syllable; if that pause were filled up by substituting "battlements" for "bulwarks," the time would be unaltered, while the pause would disappear. But the case is quite other with the second and fourth lines. These are undoubtedly followed by a distinct and unavoidable interval of silence. Some writers teach that this is because the four lines are all of equal length, the second and forth having a "silent foot" at the end. As we cannot define a pause which is never filled up by syllables, it seems safer to say that this, our familiar "ballad-measure," contains really two lines of seven periods, whose termination is marked by a distinct but unmetrical pause.

Patmore, who upheld the view just referred to, contended that one of his own poems, written in duple rising three-period metre—

> How strange it is to wake
> And watch, while others sleep—

owed its specially solemn and mournful effect to the fact that each line was followed by a pause equal to the time of two syllables.[1] His friend Tennyson ridiculed this theory, and set himself to disprove it by composing comic lines to the same measure.[2] It is certainly difficult to detect anything mournful or solemn in these lines from Cowper:

[1] Essay as before, in "Collected Poems," vol. ii., p. 243. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 183.

[2] "Life," vol. i., p. 470.

> When all within is peace,
> How Nature seems to smile!
> Delights that never cease
> The livelong day beguile.[1]

Even great critics, it would appear, allow their theories to run away with them, and forget the necessity of testing assertions by hard fact.

Our best-known measures, of which ballad-metre and the heroic lines are samples, do undoubtedly seem to be followed by a short non-metrical pause. When the sense of one line runs into another, this stop is disregarded in delivery, being shortened so as to be imperceptible, but still exists. True *enjambement*, as the French call it, in a metrical sense exists only when beginnings and endings of lines meet in one period, as we have seen happen in some specimens of triple metre. True lines, therefore, are probably less common in triple than in duple verse. Beyond this generalization it seems unsafe to dogmatize, and so long as lineal division does not clash with rhythm it matters little how a page is arranged.

The last question which it seems necessary to ask in this study concerns a point which may have presented itself, at more than one stage, to any reader who has accompanied the argument thus far. Do duple and triple metre ever meet in the same poem? Hitherto they have been considered separately, as if wholly distinct and incompatible; do facts bear out such severance? This question

[1] "Minor Poems," "Song."

goes to the very root of metrical analysis, and its examination may fitly close our inquiry.

"Mixed metres" are mentioned in our books of prosody, but the term needs explanation. If it mean merely that now two syllables and now three occupy succeeding periods in the same line, this is true of our most regular measures. The unit of heroic verse is pronounced by Mr. A. J. Ellis to be "indiscriminately either dissyllabic or trisyllabic."[1] Yet critics agree that poems like Coleridge's "Christabel," Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel," and Byron's "Siege of Corinth," differ in metrical kind rather than degree from poems of more ordinary and orthodox type; and they account for this by saying that the metre of these poems is "mixed." Do they mean, and would they be right in meaning, that the fundamental rhythm itself alters, that duple and triple time meet and intermingle?

What would this imply? If we attempt to alternate duple and triple *beats* in any movement, we shall find that we always reduce them to a common integer, as when the feet are stamped in "Kentish fire." The time-sense, the irresistible craving for regular succession, leaves us no choice. How, then, can duple and triple units alternate in one rhythm? Dissyllables and trisyllables can, of course, but only when equalized in time. The two syllables must be spread out to equal the three, or the three compressed to equal the two. Instances of both are frequent in our verse, but alternation without equality

[1] Philological Society's "Transactions," 1873-1874, p. 644.

seems inconceivable. Our disregard of quantity, and neglect of time, may easily lead astray here. It is tempting to assume that the unit of all rhythm is one and the same, so that metres differ only as this unit is filled by two, or three, or even four syllables. Duple metre would then simply mean a preponderance of dissyllabic units, triple of trisyllabic, while mixed metre would blend both freely. But this belies the dictate of our senses, and breaks with the tradition of music and the popular ear. The units of duple and of triple time are different. A "triplet" in duple metre does not occupy the time of a triple period. All *measure* does not use one measure. English syllables poorly represent time, and can usually be fitted to any rhythm. We have seen that a line of eight syllables may contain four duple units, or four triple; that a line of fifteen syllables may be a "heroic" line, or a line of five triple periods. Syllables alone are insufficient guide. They may be varied at the poet's pleasure. But duple and triple *beats* are essentially different, and one does not see how they can coexist side by side. Unequal units do not make rhythm. Duple and triple time are both normal to English verse, and each has its own unit. However or whatever compensation may assist to balance syllables, the time-space in each remains unaltered. All metre is not fundamentally the same metre. Duple rhythm moves to duple time, triple to triple, and each keeps its individuality. To suppose them blent in a rhythm composed of both is surely to contradict the verdict of our ears.

This does not, however, prevent rapid transition from one to the other. It does not imply that duple and triple time may not alternate in our verse, as hexameter and iambic did in Greek.[1] Here, fortunately, theory may give place to example. A chorus in Swinburne's "Erechtheus" runs thus:

With a leap of his limbs as a lion's, a cry from his lips as of thunder,
In a storm of amorous godhead filled with fire,
From the height of the heaven that was rent with the roar of his coming in sunder
Sprang the strong God on the spoil of his desire.[2]

This speaks for itself. Here, beyond doubt, are lines of triple rhythm alternated with lines of duple. It will be seen how remarkable is the effect, how striking the contrast, intensified by change from rising cadence in the odd lines to falling in the even. I know of no exact parallel in English poetry. But the uniqueness is due mainly to continuity of rapid change, successive single lines alternating with regularity. If from single lines we pass to groups of lines, examples are easier to find, such as this of Blake's:

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.

---

[1] The precise definition of time by syllabic quantity in Greek and Latin verse, however, rendered possible there effects which are impossible to us. Classic precedents seldom hold good in English, conditions differing.

[2] "Erechtheus: a Tragedy" (1876), p. 33.

The moon, like a flower
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles on the night. [1]

By itself this excerpt may scarcely be deemed conclusive, but I conceive that no one reading the little poem through will doubt that in each stanza the first quatrain moves to duple time, the second to triple.

In these instances succcession is regular. If, now, we turn to the poems before mentioned, we shall find change of time not less apparent. "Christabel" is mainly in duple metre, but some passages pass clearly into triple, as, for example, one near the end of the First Part, beginning:

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!

Similar transitions abound in Scott's "Lay," admittedly moulded on Coleridge's metre; also in Byron's "Siege," which undoubtedly followed Scott's lead. In all three poems, however, and very many others since, the transitions come not at regular intervals, but apparently haphazard. Even this is not all. While some passages are clearly in duple metre and others as clearly in triple, a large number seem to waver between the two, and might be read as either. Take these well-known lines:

Alas! they had been friends in youth.
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny, and youth is vain;

[1] "Songs of Innocence," "Night."

> And to be wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain. [1]

This can be easily enough read to duple time, but the third and fourth lines seem distinctly tending toward triple. They seem to strain on the leash, eager to break into more rapid measure. Such lines, rather than mere irregularity of transition, I conceive to be responsible, for the "mixed" result. Coleridge, the master, indeed passes freely from one rhythm to the other, even in consecutive lines, *e.g.*,

> For nothing near it could I see,
> Save the grass and green herbs underneath the old tree.

His followers seem often more visibly to halt between the two. But in all of them this metre is characterized, not merely by frequent and irregular transits of time—though these, no doubt, aid the impression—but by what is apparently a conscious attempt to combine the effect of both. This becomes its distinctive mark. It is rightly styled "mixed metre," not because duple and triple periods blend in unity (a thing surely unimaginable), but because the poet intermingles both rhythms and does his best to assimilate their effects. Despite the reprobation of earlier critics, this form of verse has taken an assured place in our poetry.

Without question, this helps to make analysis more difficult. We must take facts as they are. Since syllables do not in themselves reveal time, and our poets are not always anxious to discriminate rhythms —may perhaps be actually trying to combine their

[1] "Christabel," Part II., near beginning.

effects—we may expect to find intricacy and possible perplexity. Words may seem capable of more than one movement, and we may feel uncertain which was intended. Some illustrations of this will be given in next Chapter. Poets, like Esaias, are very bold; sometimes, possibly, over-bold. They might attempt, for example, to alternate duple with triple time in successive portions of one line, as if one wrote:

With a leap of his limbs as a lion's, godhead filled with fire.

I do not think such an attempt has ever been made; whether it could be made with success is beyond the critic's province to say. Coleridge's metre had its comic precursors, and was considered unfit for serious poetry; his genius proved this false. Other experiments may yield similarly unexpected results. We must not seek to fetter inspiration. But two things, I think, may be asserted with confidence. One is, that the actual cadences of verse depend largely on their temporal rhythm. The other, that whatever be the inter-relation of duple with triple time, and even if the period in each were of the same length, compensation by pause remains certain. Balancing two syllables against three must imply their equalization in time. Under both heads, therefore, previous contentions are justified. *Time* is seen to be a fact of prime import in our verse. Neglect of it cannot but be fatal to just scansion. For it remains the sole real measurer of rhythm. Temporal periods, however disguised, form the absolute units of English metre.

CHAPTER VIII

EXEMPLIFICATIONS OF METHOD

THE *modus operandi* of time-scansion has now been defined to the best of my power, and I have disclaimed all wish to invade the field of the higher critic. But some further practical illustration may reasonably be asked. After all, most theories of verse sound well in the abstract. It must be poor analysis which cannot wear a face of verisimilitude while confronted only with our commoner metres. The trial comes when it encounters difficult and unusual phenomena. Does it explain these better than other theories, make them more intelligible, more easy to follow? Unless a theory does this, it is of small use. Prosody should be a practical science, helping us to unravel intricacies of structure. That explanation is best which throws most light on the facts, and accords with them best. In this concluding Chapter, therefore, I propose to select a few specimens of unusual verse, and consider how far time-measure elucidates their construction. The Appendix which follows will do the same thing to some extent, though in a specially restricted field. In this way I hope to show that the method

adopted is no air-drawn fancy, but a real key to prosodial problems.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating, but much depends on the cook. A theory may be true, yet wrongly applied; good material can be spoiled by bad handling. If some of the explanations about to be offered misplease, let it not be too hastily concluded that the theory inspiring them is fallacious. Time being determined by ear, not by arithmetic, there may well be room for difference of opinion. Other theories by no means furnish infallible tests. My scansions must be taken as suggestions, not *ex cathedra* judgements. Acceptance of their general tenor is not incompatible with some disagreement in respect of details.

If I am asked to define the metre of this line:

From the unknown sea to the unseen shore—

I cannot answer fully. It is clearly in duple rising metre, but whether it contains four periods or five it is impossible to say. If it occurred in heroic verse, there would be no difficulty in spreading it over five periods; if in "octosyllabic," none in adapting it to four. This is because the syllables are given us, but not the time. If we had the whole poem before us, time would be manifest, and would fix the metre. In Greek verse a fragment like this would reveal its structure absolutely, each syllable disclosing its quantity. The difference in our case is patent.[1]

[1] "A metrical scheme which fails to inform us in what metre detached decasyllabic lines are written is really no scheme at all" "Saturday Review," April 12th, 1902, p. 465. The

As a matter of fact, I do not remember whence the line comes, or in what metre it is written; the illustration is all the better on that account, and no other method of scansion can go further on the data given.

Similarly, if we read this line by itself—

> To have loved, to have thought, to have done—

we cannot possibly tell whether it is duple metre or triple. The words by themselves do not show. But when we compare its context—

> Is it so small a thing
> *To have* enjoy'd the sun,
> *To have lived* light in the spring,
> *To have loved, to have thought, to have done;*
> *To have* advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes?[1]—

we perceive at once that the time is duple, that the line in question consists of three "triplets." The words which I have ventured to italicize, it will be felt, cover in each case the normal time of two syllables. "To have" represents sometimes a monosyllable, sometimes a dissyllable. The easy-going way in which the poet oscillates between these uses may seem a blemish to some; it at any rate shows how little aid syllables give us in determining metre.

writer of this sentence is comparing English verse with Greek, and desires to apply similar methods to each. But different materials require different methods (compare a recent footnote, p. 116). No system of scansion can give to English syllables qualities which they do not possess.

[1] Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna" (Act I., Sc. 2).

Compensation by pause is well exemplified in Shelley's "Arethusa" and "Hymn of Pan." The time of each is triple, and the syllables of main accentuation are separated by an interval uniform in duration though not in content. Thus, in the lines,

> And opened a *chasm*
> In the *rocks*; with the *spasm*
> *All* Erymanthus *shook*,

the space which separates "spasm" from "all" is clearly equal to that which intervenes between the other italicized syllables; while the rhetorical pause after "rocks," emphasize it how we will, in no way affects structure. Four syllables are sometimes crowded into a period, as in this case,

> And now from their fountains
> In Enna's *mountains*,
> *Down one* vale where the morning basks,

and we cannot read this without consciousness of the crowding. With these provisoes, the analysis of either poem offers no difficulty, unless lines of irregular length in the "Hymn" be accounted such.

A beautiful little poem by Tennyson [1] may be quoted entire.

> All along the valley, stream that flashest white,
> Deepening thy voice with the deepening of the night,
> All along the valley, where thy waters flow,
> I walk'd with one I loved two and thirty years ago.
> All along the valley, while I walk'd to-day,
> The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away;

---

[1] "In the Valley of Cauteretz."

> For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed,
> Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,
> And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree,
> The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

This does not seem difficult metre, yet has perplexed more than one prosodist. The word "years" in the sixth line, the second "voice" in the eighth, are reckoned dissyllables. The structure is pronounced "trochaic, with iambic intrusion," and some words are "hyper-metrical." On a time-basis, these difficulties disappear, and the structure is shown perfectly simple. Seven duple rising periods constitute the rhythm. These are never wholly occupied by sound, unless in the fourth line we choose to make "loved" a dissyllable;[1] more naturally it is a monosyllable followed by a pause. Silent intervals occur in each line, not always in the same place, covering the space sometimes of one syllable, sometimes of two. These are part of the structure, essential to the effect; every careful reader recognizes them. Omission of initial syllables gives four lines *falling* cadence; the others having *rising*. But the basis, the fundamental time-measure, remains unaltered throughout. Only one further point requires

[1] Tennyson differs from most of his contemporaries in printing *'d* when he does not wish the vowel sounded (*e.g.*, *walk'd* in this line), unless the verb ends in a vowel, when he prints *ed* in every case. The above spelling therefore gives no clue to sound, but I cannot believe he meant us to say "lovéd." In the sixth line, "years" almost fills double space through its natural quantity, the pause being more *on* than *after* the word. But the word does not make the metre; it is this latter which gives value to the word.

notice. In the second line, the word "deepening" may seem to have two different values. It might be supposed to fill the space of three syllables when first used, of two when repeated. If this were so, it would be nowise extraordinary; we have just seen a little instance in the quotation from Arnold. Tennyson himself elsewhere writes:

> The Queen of Scots at least is *Catholic.*
> Ay, Madam, *Catholic*; but I will not have . . .[1]

But in the line under consideration spelling goes to show that he wished his word treated as a *triplet* each time, and the pause before the first "Deepening" makes this easy to do. The more identically we pronounce this word on the two occasions of its appearance the nearer we shall come to realizing the intended effect.

Falling cadence and frequent pauses give character to the metre of Mr. Meredith's "Love in the Valley" and "Phoebus with Admetus."[2] A single couplet from the latter will illustrate:

> Mindful were the shepherds, as now the noon severe
> Bent a burning eyebrow to brown evetide.

If for "shepherds" we were to substitute *shepherds*

[1] "Queen Mary" (Act V., Sc. 1). Is it not Keats who speaks of

> those to whom the *miseries* of the world
> Are *misery*, and will not let them rest?

Similar instances are not rare, and seem to show that our poets enjoy the effect of these contrasts.

[2] "Selected Poems" by George Meredith (1897), pp. 47 and 77.

all, for "severe" *severely*, for "eyebrow" *fiery brow*, and for "brown evetide" *pallid eventide*, we should have filled up the silent spaces which my ear detects in reading these lines, and to which their music owes its charm. As filled up, the periods would appear strictly regular, and comparatively insipid. By deft use of pause the poet creates what is practically a new measure, easy of scansion if time be taken as the basis. Its framework continues the same throughout each stanza of both poems, slight alterations of pause adding a sense of variety. The short lines in the second piece are merely two long lines printed as four, without any real alteration of pattern.

"Brown evetide" gives not two merely, but three, consecutive syllables of equally strong accentuation —a conjunction which metrists have declared impossible. It is possible, I think, only when they are separated by a pause. Every time they occur, therefore, we may assume that they cover the normal time of two syllables. This explains the structure of

> *Cheer, boys, cheer!* no more of idle sorrow;[1]

or,

> *Here great souls*, in a plenitude of vision,
> *Planned high deeds* as immortal as the sun;[2]

or, the strong syllables coming at the end of a line, as in Mr. Meredith's case, instead of at the beginning,

[1] Charles Mackay in "The Emigrants" ("Works," Chandos Classics, p. 546).

[2] "Shadow-land," by Lord Bowen. See his "Memoir" by Sir H. S. Cunningham (1897), p. 214.

Savage I was sitting in my *house*, *late*, *lone*;
Weary, dreary with the *long day's work*.[1]

The duple structure of the pieces here quoted from is in other respects unmistakeable, unless indeed we prefer to call Browning's effect quadruple.

For a case of triple metre masquerading as duple take this verse from Browning's poem "Rephan":[2]

Nothing begins—so needs to end:
Where fell it short at first? Extend
Only the same, no change can mend.

These three lines (unintelligible when thus isolated) might very well pass for duple metre. But comparison with the rest of the poem dispels this idea. Its rhythm is at once felt to be triple. A typical line occurs in the first verse:

When my home was the star of my god Rephan.

Here are evidently four periods, of which three contain three syllables, the fourth two only. In a few lines the final period seems to carry three syllables (unless the third period be "amphibrachic"), *e.g.*,

None felt distaste when better or worse.
Not reach—aspire yet never attain.

---

[1] Robert Browning, Epilogue to "Fifine at the Fair" (1872); or in "Selections," p. 248, "The Householder."

[2] "Asolando" (1899). The name "Rephan" is accented on the second syllable. It is so spelt in the Revised Version of the Bible (Acts, vii. 43), while the Authorized has "Remphan." Browning's choice may have been influenced by metrical feeling.

Usually it has "iambic" cadence, signalizing the end of a line. Other periods contain dissyllables or trisyllables at pleasure, and the first often contains only one syllable, giving *falling* effect. But the poem in its entirety manifestly moves to triple time. Its lines have affinity with

Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,

not with

The stag at eve had drunk his fill.

From this follows that in the stanza first quoted syllables do not correspond to periods in the manner we imagined. The poem reaching us as a whole, we read this like the other stanzas to triple rhythm, its periods spaced out by liberal admixture of pause; thus and only thus is its metre determined.

Triple rhythm, we have seen throughout our study, drops one or more syllables with ease. The examples already cited in this Chapter show that duple metre can at times emulate this freedom. Particularly, perhaps, is this the case when its periods are coupled so as to produce somewhat of a quadruple effect. It appeared that verse so framed would be characterized by rapid movement, and some vagueness of accentual signalizing. Yet if the resultant impression be well marked itself, this need not disturb enjoyment.

As an illustration of this, take a verse of Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic":

Like leviathans afloat
Lay their bulwarks on the brine,

While the sign of battle flew
On the lofty British line.
It was ten of April morn by the chime;
As they drifted on their path
There was silence deep as death,
And the boldest held his breath
For a time.

The opening lines here might pass for ordinary duple falling metre:

Like le- | via- | thans a- | float ⏑
Lay their | bulwarks | on the | brine ⏑ ;

or even for duple rising, with initial triplet:

Like levi- | athans | afloat
Lay their bul- | warks on | the brine.

But neither of these quite represents the way we read it, or explains the word "morn" in the fifth line, which clearly covers the time of two syllables. I take it that the time is indeed duple, but that the periods are coupled to produce a quadruple impression. Occasionally this is forgotten, when the time becomes frankly duple, *e.g.*,

Again—again—again!
Now joy, old England, raise!

But the prevailing rhythm seems to run thus:

Like levia- | thans afloat ⏑
Lay their bulwarks | on the brine, ⏑
While the sign of | battle flew ⏑
On the lofty | British line. ⏑
It was ten of | April morn ⏑ | by the chime; ⏑
Etc. etc.

The second period always drops a syllable, necessitating a pause. In the longer fifth line, the added third period exactly repeats the measure of the second. The last two lines of each stanza correspond precisely to the fifth:

And the boldest | held his breath ⏑ | for a time ⏑,

and are written as two lines merely to draw attention to the rhymes. "For a time" is not a single period, but should carry two stresses, as is well seen in a line like

Led them on.

Whether or no this justly explains Campbell's metre, it is certain that we read it without any difficulty. Dropped syllables do not perplex us. The first line begins with one:

⏑ Of Nelson | and the North ⏑,

which in weaker hands might cause dubiety. But the strong swing of the verse carries us over all obstacles. Prosodists may hesitate over its scansion; the casual reader makes no demur. Yet this measure is singular, perhaps unique; he will not have met its like before. That troubles him not, since the rhythmic beat is clear and strong. Temporal impressions must be definite, if unusual forms of metre are to be accepted and enjoyed.

Quadruple cadence might seem again suggested—with the pause in a different place—by the "Coronach" in Scott's "Lady of the Lake" (Canto III. § 16):

He is gone on | ⏑ the mountain,
He is lost to | ⏑ the forest.

But, as the pause thus indicated is never replaced by a syllable, we cannot verify its existence; nor do I think it real. If we attempt to fill it up, as by writing

He is gone on | yonder mountain,
He is lost to | yonder forest,

I think we must feel that we have altered the measure. Dissyllabic rhyming seems here to produce a fictitious quadruple impression. Substitute monosyllables, and the time is shown obviously triple—

He is gone | on the mount,
He is lost | to the wood.

The second syllable of a dissyllabic rhyme is, in most cases at least, outside the metrical scheme; and I do not doubt it is so here. But from this instance we may learn how quickly the ear accepts another suggestion, how ready it is to divide each line into two equal periods, three syllables balanced against four. Real dropped syllables do occur at the beginnings of lines, *e.g.*,

∪ The font, reappearing . . .

And in one line:

Like the bubble on the fountain,

a dissyllable is substituted for a monosyllable, so that in this as in other cases four syllables are carried by a triple period.

Variety of metre is a note of recent verse; variety of time we have been forewarned to expect. A good

instance of this latter seems afforded by Tennyson's ballad "The Revenge."[1] Probably we are all conscious of something unusual in the measure of this poem, some irregularity remarkable in itself, yet not causing uncertainty of effect. I believe this is due to management of time. The duple metre in which the poem opens either passes into triple, or—it may be—is so continuously overlaid with triplets as to suggest the other movement. This change occurs suddenly at the beginning of Section IV.—

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and to fight—

soon gives way, but returns in Section V. Thenceforward the two cadences are successive, now one being favoured, now the other. Can we possibly call these lines of one pattern?—

But anon the great San Philip she bethought herself and went.
And the sun went down, and the stars came out far over the summer sea.

Surely they are different, and deliberately contrasted. We are never left in doubt which is which. Consummate art prevents that, and wields either with equal force. As a rule, each section is wholly in one or other. The last of all differs from the two which precede it in so marked and singular a way that the question might rest on this instance alone; change of time, real or apparent, seems the only possible explanation.

[1] "Ballads and other Poems," 1880.

An earlier poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," shows similar handling of time even more clearly, the structure being simpler.

Half a league, | half a league, |
Half a league | onward

must be triple rhythm (though Heaven forbid we call these *dactyls!*). But

Forward, the Light Brigade !
Charge for the guns, he said—

manifestly changes to duple.[1] The change is disguised by inverted accent in each first period, so that the line is half finished before the effect reveals itself. None the less it is unmistakeable, and I feel sure that every careful reader feels it, as well as the change back to triple time in

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them.

The syllabic difference here is very slight, but the temporal difference asserts itself boldly, and carries us from one measure to the other without risk of confusion.

The tendency of late years to give duple metre a character other than its own, by charging it heavily

[1] A parallel is afforded by the short lines in Scott's "Boat-song" ("Lady of the Lake," II. 19), *e.g.*,

Heaven send it happy dew,
Earth lend it sap anew !

But in these time seems to me left somewhat ambiguous, with resulting unsatisfactory vagueness of effect. The same criticism can be made in other pieces by Scott.

with triplets, is very noticeable. One of Miss Rossetti's last poems may illustrate this.

> Sleeping at last, the trouble and tumult over,
> Sleeping at last, the struggle and horror past,
> Cold and white, out of sight of friend and of lover,
> Sleeping at last.[1]

Still more striking metrically is George Meredith's "Melampus"[2]—

> With love exceeding a simple love of the things
> That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck.

And one or two poems by Mr. Robert Bridges[3] might be cited in the same connection. These writers seem trying to do throughout a whole poem what their predecessors were content to do in scattered lines, witness two quoted in previous pages, Milton's

> Fled over Adria to the Hesperian fields,

and Swinburne's

> Thou art older and colder of spirit and blood than I.

This is not triple metre, but duple abounding in triplets. Whether such an effect be satisfactory as basis for a poem, the reader must judge himself. To me there seems something falsetto about it, something strained and factitious and unnatural. As one

[1] "New Poems" (1896), p. 184.

[2] "Selected Poems," as before, p. 83.

[3] Compare in "Minor Poems" (1890), Bk. II., No. 2, "Whither, O splendid ship"; No. 7, "The Downs"; Bk. III., No. 2, "London Snow"; No. 15, "Awake, my heart." The lyrical cry of the last of these is delightful.

of many effects, it not only pleases but delights; yet *toujours perdrix* soon palls. I suspect also that most readers are puzzled by it. Time is deliberately made uncertain, and our sense of rhythm rebels. We crave a definite and unmistakeable beat. That an adverse verdict will finally be given on these grounds it were rash at present to anticipate. The experiment is at least interesting, and critics should watch its development.

Christina Rossetti was a weaver of particularly subtle verse-patterns, so subtle as almost to elude analysis. Time-measure alone can help us to deal with them. There is indeed no difficulty in following her most boldly marked metres, like—

> O where are you going with your love-locks flowing
> On the west wind blowing along this valley track?[1]

or that noble hymn in "Old and New Year Ditties"[2]—

> Passing away, saith the World, passing away.

But more characteristic and favourite is such measure as that of "Mother Country"[3]—

> Oh what is that country
> And where can it be,
> Not mine own country,
> But dearer far to me?

---

[1] "Amor Mundi": "Poems," edition of 1884, p. 192. This is, of course, the metre of Macaulay's "Battle of Naseby," modified by dissyllabic rhythms and set to new haunting harmonies.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

In this and similar poems [1] syllables are handled with great freedom, and the ear must be kept awake to catch her delicate music. How far she ventures in opposing syllables to time may be seen from the concluding lines of the poem just quoted:

> But a vain shadow
> If one considereth;
> Vanity of vanities,
> As the Preacher saith.

Compare the last quatrain of "Sleep at Sea," where the same words recur; words which she fits also to heroic measure in her sonnet "One Certainty" [2]—

> Vanity of vanities, the Preacher saith—

and to many other periods in other poems. Her departures from time are so manifold, her structure seems often so capricious, that it may be questioned if most readers really enjoy them from a metrical standpoint. Beautiful as her cadences are to a trained ear, to a careless one they must sometimes seem dissonant; her place as a "poets' poet" is readily enough accounted for by the supersubtle and aerial delicacy of these gossamer-like yet skilfully woven verse-patterns.

Lyrics like these suggest song-rhythms. But in most words written for music the pauses will be found more gross and mensurable. Thus in "Green

[1] Compare "Dream-love," p. 119; "A Year's Windfalls," p. 140; "Sleep at Sea," p. 254; also "Summer," p. 83, with notable variations.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

grow the rashes, O," by Burns, the chorus opens with imperfectly syllabized periods—

> ⏑ Green ⏑ grow the rashes, O!
> ⏑ Green ⏑ grow the rashes, O!
> The sweetest hours that e'er I spend
> Are spent among the lasses, O!

Here the third and fourth lines fill up with syllables the blanks shown in their predecessors. And the rest of the piece repeats unvaryingly the cadence of these latter lines. Metrical subtlety is not characteristic of Burns; his pauses are clear and distinct, his effects bold and natural. Simplicity seems essential to song-writing. Exquisite verse needs no aid of music, and always loses something—though it may sometimes gain much—by wedlock with its rival. The highest poetry has sufficing music of its own.

On the other hand, not all words set to tunes are rhythmical in themselves. Prose sentences can be so set, while verse-lines often put off their own music and take that of the air to which they are joined. The English version of "Adeste, fideles!" is sometimes taken for verse. Its opening lines may be rudely rhythmical—

> O come, all ye faithful,
> Joyfully triumphant—

but with the second stanza deception becomes impossible.

> God of God!
> Light of light!

is in no sense English verse. The words have no metre in this context; they are simply prose

words, which with considerable violence are accommodated to an extraneous time. Conversely, while it is easy to find *four triple periods* in such words as

> Dear—dear—what can the matter be![1]
> March! march! Ettrick and Teviotdale![2]

or those others often quoted by early writers, of whose authorship I am ignorant—

> See—see—rural felicity—

it may perhaps be questionable whether this effect is not in part due to the airs with which they are associated. Words can of course be set to more than one air, with different intervals and modulations; and none of the times so given need be their metrical time. When we have always heard words linked with one particular tune, it is difficult to realize that they can have any other movement. But unless they have a movement of their own, apart altogether from vocal or instrumental accompaniment, they have no claim to be accounted English verse at all.

These few hints and specimens may serve as samples of the manner in which it is suggested that time-scansion should be applied. The results may not seem very precise, but are they not real and helpful so far as they go? Can the same be said of any other system? Merely to name and classify syllables does not carry us very far; it leaves out

[1] Old English song.
[2] Scott, in "The Monastery," chap. xxv.

what gives character and swing to our verse. Temporal periods of some sort admittedly underlie metre ; can it be right to ignore them ? To me at least they seem the most important conditions of the problem. Whether they have been rightly examined and interpreted in these pages is another matter. Here, as elsewhere, there is no royal road to learning, and mistakes may easily have been made. Prosodical pontiffs should least of all claim infallibility. But that the main idea of time-measurement is valid I entertain no doubt whatever. It brings verse into harmony with its sister arts. It maintains in theory rules which we all observe in practice. No one who reads English verse by rhythm fails to space it into equal divisions. Oratorical delivery, for its own purposes, may disregard these, and be justified in so doing. But the sense of rhythm remains fundamental in our minds. To translate that sense into articulated law is the real work of prosody. Some elementary contribution to that work, on however limited a scale, has been attempted in this study of metre.

APPENDIX

PSEUDO-CLASSICAL MEASURES

THE metres which it is now proposed shortly to examine do not, in conception at least, belong rightfully to English verse. They are professed attempts to imitate the structure of Greek and Latin poetry. As such, scholars condemn them, asserting that there is no real reproduction of the measures sought to be naturalized. English readers, on the other hand, both male and female, appear to read them with enjoyment, and to find nothing repulsive in their metrical form. Some study of how this happens will usefully supplement previous discussion, and may tend to clarify our ideas as to the true nature of English verse.

Such attempts have been made on two different lines. Early in our literature, some few Elizabethan writers tried to reproduce Classic metre on a basis of quantity, accent being either ignored or thrown into opposition. This enterprise was unfortunate, if the principles laid down in preceding pages be correct. No metre which gives quantity the first place, and neglects or violates accent, is likely to succeed in English. It is opposed to all the habits of our speech and our verse. There were other reasons for failure, but they need not be particularized.

That failure ensued is certain. Our poets would have none of this quantity-hunting. Spenser, Greene, Campion and others tried, but soon abandoned it. The Sixteenth Century, which had seen its inception, all but saw its conclusion. One or two belated efforts on this line are recorded during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, and the Nineteenth witnessed an attempt at revival, of which more anon. But, for practical purposes, verse based on quantity may be said to have died out three hundred years ago. No serious general attempt has been made since then to substitute it for our ordinary verse. To any but the student it is absolutely unknown, and would be quite incomprehensible. The description in last paragraph does not apply to verse of this pattern.

The other line of attempt has proved more popular. Noting the predominance of accent and the subordination of quantity in modern speech, certain authors tried to reproduce Classic structure by substitution of the former for the latter. This attempt dates from the middle of the Eighteenth Century. In this country it had hardly taken shape before it was powerfully stimulated by examples from Germany. There, Klopstock and Voss, followed by Goethe and Schiller, practised metres of this kind energetically. Our first acquaintance with their work seems to have been due to translations by William Taylor (of Norwich) in the closing years of the Century. Coleridge and Southey, among others, were struck with his specimens, corresponded with their translator, wrote short poems in like measure

and projected a joint long one. Only fragments of the latter survive, but some twenty years later Southey wrote and published his "Vision of Judgment" (1821), with a preface explaining and defending the structure of his lines. His experiment was severely criticised, privately and publicly. But it founded a school, which flourishes still. The controversy which his preface started flourishes also. Critics denounce Southey's view as a "pestilent heresy";[1] poets go on writing verse like his, and readers seem to enjoy it. Longfellow's "Evangeline" and "Miles Standish," Charles Kingsley's "Andromeda," Clough's "Bothie of Tobernavuolich," are conspicuous examples of poems written in the same metre as Southey's. Pieces in other metres, based on the same structural idea, will be cited presently. The poems now named cannot be called failures; with some of us they may be particular favourites. How is this result possible, if the metre be such a miserable abortion as it is styled?

For the sake of completeness, it may be noted that there have been attempts to combine the two lines. Clough and Spedding, both friends of Tennyson's, made faint efforts to revive quantitative verse—efforts seconded vigorously by Charles Bagot Cayley, who translated the whole "Iliad" in such metre, and later by a young Cambridge scholar, whose early death deprived English

[1] "The Iliad of Homer," by Lord Derby (1864), preface, p. vi.

prosody of a most brilliant recruit.[1] The Laureate, in his "Experiments in Quantity,"[2] essayed a new departure by trying to write verses in which every accented syllable should be long by Latin rule, and every long syllable be signalized by accent. The extraordinary difficulty of such a task—not wholly overcome by Tennyson himself—has not deterred some followers. Notably Prof. Robinson Ellis, in his "Poems and Fragments of Catullus" (1871), applied this method, hampered by the additional difficulty of faithful translation, with ingenuity truly marvellous. Whether such a *tour de force* achieved its purpose may well seem doubtful. If previous argument can be trusted, much of this laborious letter-counting was thrown away. Latin rules do not necessarily hold good in English; our quantity has its own laws, its own place. Still, the fact remains that—as said before—verses framed in this way can be enjoyed by English readers, and the question is how this happens. To answer it we must consider the effect produced by such lines on an ordinary ear.

Tennyson's "Alcaics" on Milton begin:

> O mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,
> O skill'd to sing of time and eternity!

---

[1] See a pamphlet "On the use of classical metres in English," by William Johnson Stone (Oxford, 1898), since reprinted with alterations, and without the specimen verses of the original edition, along with "Milton's Prosody" by Robert Bridges (Oxford, 1901, etc.).

[2] "Enoch Arden, and other Poems" (1864).

The Classic metre which these lines are supposed to represent runs quantitatively as follows:

– – | ⏑ – | – – | ⏑⏑ – | ⏑ –.[1]

Tennyson's lines should reproduce this pattern, every syllable which is long in the scheme being also "accented." The fifth syllable in the above scheme is long. The fifth syllable in Tennyson's first line is "*in-*," in his second "*of.*" Can it possibly be held that these syllables are "accented"? Does any reader attribute length, or weight, or importance of any kind, to these syllables? Unless he does, he is not reading the lines by Latin metre. That metre absolutely requires this quality in its fifth syllable. As none of us read Tennyson's line so, we do not read it as "alcaic." As what, then, do we read it?

My belief is that we read it simply as a line of four periods, in triple falling metre. Dividing the words thus,

> O mighty- | mouth'd in- | ventor of | harmonies,
> O skill'd to | sing of | time and e- | ternity,

we read it as we should read any similar line of English verse, making the periods equal in length. The second period is therefore felt to be spaced out by pause, while in the third and fourth time is more completely occupied by syllables. Possibly,

[1] The above represents the scheme used by Latin poets, but Tennyson ("Life," one-volume edition, p. 425) says he used the Greek scheme, which is more elastic. It will be noted that these divisions or "feet" are not isochronous. This alone would prevent any English-trained ear from enjoying their cadence in combination. Did Tennyson pronouuce the first syllable of "eternity" with a short vowel?

in the first period, a careful reader notes a certain quantitative retardation caused by leading off from two long syllables; and he may vaguely regard this as a "Classic" effect. Beyond this, I doubt if he notices structure. The third and fourth lines are similarly dealt with:

God-gifted | organ- | voice of | England,
Milton, a | name to re- | sound for | ages.

Dissyllables and trisyllables are felt to be here cunningly contrasted, and the dissyllabic terminations of these lines are noted as against the trisyllabic ones of the two former. These points, and the absence of rhyme, produce a certain exotic impression. The stanza is not English in form, yet can be read as English verse. I am confident that this is how it is read, and that no reader attributes length to the second syllable of "organ," though the scheme of Latin metre requires length in that place. The lines, in short, are not read as "alcaics," but as English verse, and as such are felt to be pleasing. Deft workmanship has created a measure which cannot for a moment be accepted as reproducing Classic type, but which has a very real, and impressive, and "original" music of its own.

Similar arguments apply in other cases. "Sapphic" stanzas are read to this time:

All the | night sleep | came not up- | on my | eyelids,
Shed not | dew, nor | shook nor un- | closed a | feather,
Yet with | lips shut | close and with | eyes of | iron
Stood and be- | held me.[1]

[1] Swinburne, "Poems and Ballads" (1866).

This is duple falling metre, with a triplet in the third period of the long lines and first of the short ones. "Hendecasyllabic" (*i.e.* eleven-syllable) metre is the above long line varied by having its triplet in the second instead of third period:

In the | month of the | long de- | cline of | roses.[1]

"Dactylics," again, are obviously four-period lines in triple falling rhythm:

Weary way- | wanderer, | languid and | sick at heart.[2]
Dactylics | call'st thou them? | God help thee, | silly one.[3]

Swinburne's specimens, indeed, give too favourable an idea of the approximation to Classic type. Most English "sapphics" are much looser. Southey, for example, begins a set with

Cold was the night-wind; drifting fast the snows fell,

which can scarcely be recognized as the same metre.[4]

[1] Swinburne, "Poems and Ballads." An artificial stress must be laid on the word "In."

[2] Southey's "Early Poems" (1797). It will be noticed that the "dactyls" of this line are very imperfect ones.

[3] "Antijacobin" (1797), satirizing Southey's lines.

[4] Compare the following, which all profess to be "sapphic" lines:

That man, God-like, seems to me sitting by thee.
George Moore, "Pagan Poems," 1881.

Change and chancefulness in my flowering youthtime.
Thomas Hardy, "Wessex Poems," 1898, first piece.

Hapless, heroic Queen of the Iceni.
"Punch," July, 2nd, 1902.

Each of these differs in structure. Compare also a remark in Chap. vi. (p. 106).

And Coleridge begins his "hendecasyllables" with two triplets—

Hear, my be- | lovèd, an | old Mi- | lesian | story[1] —

making a line of twelve syllables instead of eleven, even if we allow "Milesian" to contain only three syllables. This looseness, of course, tends to show that the lines were written by ear instead of by rule, that time rather than syllabic structure was the basis relied on.

Further illustration is afforded by "choriambic" metre. In Classic verse, the usual type of this metre contained three choriambs, preceded by a spondee and followed by an iamb. Here is a sample line, with its quantitative scheme:

– – | – ⏑⏑– | –⏑ ⏑– | – ⏑⏑ | – ⏑–

Tu ne | quaesieris | —scire nefas— | quem mihi, quem | tibi.

Swinburne's experiment follows this pattern with approximate fidelity:

Love, what | ailed thee to leave | life that was made | lovely,
we thought, | with love?[2]

But, to an English ear, each of these "choriambs"

[1] "Poems," "Catullian Hendecasyllables." All his lines follow this pattern, which is not that of Catullus.

[2] "Poems and Ballads," second series (1878), "Choriambics." Coventry Patmore, in the "North British Review" for August, 1857, (p. 159), pronounced "jaunty choriambics" manifestly unsuited to a dirge. When the paper, now placed as an appendix to his collected poems, was reprinted in 1878 as a preface to "Amelia," this remark was omitted, doubtless because Swinburne's poem had proved it erroneous. The moral is patent.

is followed by a possibllity of pause. Swinburne's metrical mastery carries him through the whole fairly long poem without a single departure from his precise pattern. Browning's "Pheidippides,"[1] on the other hand, seems to show how an English poet would more naturally treat this cadence. This poem does not indeed follow the Classical scheme, but an effect as of three choriambs seems to pervade it. A sample line, with the time-measure of the poem as I read it, will explain my view of its structure:

˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘

Pre-sent to help, po-tent to save, (Pan;) pa-tron I call.

The time is triple rhythm. Every time-mark here shown has sometimes a corresponding syllable, and no syllable occurs throughout the poem otherwise than in accordance with these time-marks.[2] But, starting from this time-basis, Browning by frequent omission of syllables produces a quasi-choriambic effect. The three groups of words:

Present to help—potent to save—patron I call—

will be recognized as analogous to Swinburne's more smoothly running feet. They are separated, in Browning's poem, by a space sometimes left blank, sometimes occupied by one syllable (as by the

[1] "Dramatic Idylls," first series (1879).

[2] Except in certain lines—about half-a-dozen in all—which contain two extra syllables at the end. Whether these lines were lengthened by inadvertence, or designedly, does not appear. With their exception, the above remarks apply to the whole poem.

bracketed word "Pan" above) or two syllables, never by more. When two syllables intervene, the metre becomes obviously triple, as for example (the intervening words are again inclosed in parenthesis):

Athens, except (for that) sparkle, thy name, (I had) mouldered to ash;

or, in a line where the time-structure is fully illustrated by syllables:

(Who could) race like a God, (bear the) face of a God, (whom a) God loved so well.

In such lines the choriambic effect is almost wholly overlaid. But in most it stands out clearly enough, allowing for Browning's habitual roughness, and seems well suited to the runner's utterance. The way in which it is superimposed on triple time, and brought out by omission of syllables, gives an object-lesson in English metre; the freedom with which pauses replace syllables, especially between the superimposed choriambs, is eminently characteristic of our whole metrical methods.

But these metres, after all, have been little more than playthings. The one form that has really passed into our verse is that started by Southey—his so-called "hexameter." Etymologically, this word means any line of *six units*. In practice it is confined to one type of such line, that known as "dactylic." In Classic verse, this moves to common time;[1] with us, it becomes a six-period line in triple

[1] A Classic *dactyl's* first syllable took the same time to pronounce as the second and third put together. Unless we read it thus, we ignore "quantity."

falling metre, ending with a dissyllable. There are other differences between our line and the Classic one, which need not detain us. This essential difference in time is enough to separate them, and to justify scholars in their contention that ours is no equivalent of the ancient line. But this does not prevent its being excellent English verse. A line like that of Longfellow's before quoted—

> This is the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks—

would pass muster anywhere as a sample of triple falling rhythm. There is nothing extraordinary about its construction. Length, rhymelessness, dissyllabic ending, seem its chief distinctive notes. The second of these is unessential; such lines can be and often are rhymed. The first and third are familiar to us in other patterns. Why, then, should we hesitate to accept this as English metre? The scholar is right in his rejection, the ordinary reader right in his acceptance. Cease calling this "hexameter" in the technical sense, or imagining that it is in any way a *simulacrum* of its supposed prototype, and the way is clear to welcome it as a native measure. This the common sense of readers during the last fifty or sixty years has already done.

The Classic hexameter was used either by itself —as we use our heroic line in "blank verse"—or alternating with a *pentameter* to form what is called "elegiac" metre. (The last name carries no significance in English, being due merely to the fact that the Greeks often used this couplet in writing

elegies.) Pentameter, of course, means any line of *five units;* but in practice it usually denotes the dactylic line of this measure, whose construction was somewhat peculiar. Two feet followed by a single syllable made up the first half of the line, while the second half repeated this structure. In English, such a line would infallibly consist of *six* periods. Grammarians dispute whether this was not so even in Greek, though the name shows such was not the common view; some wish to write it as two lines, which seems needlessly formal. With us, in any case, there should be no possible doubt about the matter. A single syllable so placed *must* be reinforced by pause, and that silent interval—if the practice of our poets teaches anything—*must* be capable of replacement by sound. Let us test these assertions by fact, Dismissing all comparison with Classic type, let us take these metres for what they really are, native measures obeying native laws. How have our poets handled them when writing by ear, not by rule, and what results have they reached?

Poems confessedly following Latin rule must be set aside. Nearly all our "hexameter" pieces come under this category. Even the "elegiac" type is usually so written, as by Browning in his "Ixion" [1] or by Mr. William Watson in his fine "Hymn to the Sea." [2] Some of Swinburne's work illustrates what we want. Several writers have noted that "Hesperia" [3] approximates closely to elegiac metre.

1 "Jososeria" (1883).

2 "The Father of the Forest, and other Poems" (1895).

3 "Poems and Ballads" (1866).

But I have not seen mentioned the still closer approximation made by a later piece. "Evening on the Broads" [1] opens thus:

Over two shadowless waters, adrift as a pinnace in peril,
Hangs as in heavy suspense, charged with irresolute light,
Softly the soul of the sunset upholden awhile on the sterile
Waves and wastes of the land, half repossessed by the night.

The metrical structure of these lines closely resembles that of Mr. Watson's poem, as any reader can see for himself. Yet Swinburne is clearly not writing "elegiac metre." The freedom of handling, the continual departure from rules by which Mr. Watson and other Classicists have needlessly bound themselves, prove this beyond doubt. Examination of this piece, therefore, should be decisive as to the points raised, and teach us truer ideas as to the nature and capabilities of verse framed on this pattern. What does such examination show?

The doctrine laid down about pause receives prompt confirmation. The second and fourth lines above quoted contain a manifest midway pause, but in other corresponding lines this pause is filled up by syllables, *e.g.*,

Thick as the darkness of leaf-shadowed Spring is encumbered with flowers.

The absolute convertibility of silence and sound in English verse is thus once more demonstrated, and

[1] "Studies in Song" (1880).

the line becomes clearly one of *six periods*. The dissyllabic ending of the *odd* lines, the monosyllabic ending of the *even*, are secured by the usual omission of syllables in the sixth period. Rhyme is used, which makes the verse seem more characteristically English, but is obviously not a structural necessity. Full correspondence of syllables with time is the rule, as elsewhere shown to be this poet's favourite effect, but exceptions are frequent. Swinburne does not hesitate to use a dissyllable where time and Classic rule demand a trisyllable, *e.g.*,

Hover the colours and clouds of the *twilight*, void of a star.
Spirits of men that are eased when the wheels of the *sun de*part.

He also substitutes four syllables for three in "*loftier*, *a*loft," "*higher than my* head," "glad of the *glory of their* life," and so forth. Manifestly he does not count syllables on his fingers, nor do his periods necessarily contain exact feet. The very first words, "Over two," are very far from forming a dactyl. Real feet do appear now and then, as with such a singer they were bound to do; but they appear accidentally, not as units of structure. In all these respects the principles which have been shown to govern English metre are strikingly illustrated; results assume the form that might have been expected. One more remains to be pointed out, somewhat more fully.

Greek dactylic lines, of course, began with a long syllable. To imitate this, our hexametrists endeavour to begin their lines with a syllable of strong accen-

tuation. But they never can keep this up for long. It is opposed to our habit of speech. All our native verse either begins with weak syllables or admits them as an alternative. Thus in triple-time verse, as we have seen, falling accent and rising are frequenty intermixed; as when Byron writes:

> Thou who art bearing my buckler and bow,
> Should the | soldiers of Saul look away from the foe.[1]

This is fatal to the hexameter as our metrists conceive it. Either they must give up counting by feet, or they must be content—as they constantly are—to begin with a weak word like "And" or "Of" or "When," and trust their reader to supply for himself a rhythm which they have failed to indicate. How does Swinburne get over this difficulty? By doing what every English poet naturally does, when not fettered by imaginary adherence to foreign rules. Normally his lines begin with a strong syllable, as in all the instances already quoted. But, when this is inconvenient, he simply prefixes weak syllables to the beat, *e.g.*,

> As a | bird unfledged is the broad-winged night . . .
> But the | glories beloved of the night . . .
> But | here by the sandbank watching . . .

This is the habitual practice of our poets, and it is strange that our hexametrists neglect it. For want of it, their verses are never readable for long together. Rhythm is confused, and the ear offended

[1] "Hebrew Melodies," "Song of Saul," second verse.

by a continual emphasizing of weak words. Even so careful a writer as Mr. Watson begins line after line with words of weak accentuation. In all our metres, it is true, such imaginary stress occurs at times; it is one of the devices adopted to secure variety. But in a still unfamiliar metre like the hexameter rhythm needs careful marking, and accentual signalization should have been specially exact, whereas in the important first syllable of a line it is continually found at fault.

It is amusing to watch the uncertainty of our hexametrists on this score. Southey debated which feet might replace the first dactyl of a line.[1] Matthew Arnold actually let the first beat fall on such a weak pair of syllables as "To a,"[2] instead of boldly prefixing these to his beat. Even Clough, who experimented freely with this metre in his "Bothie," never or hardly ever ventures on this licence. Yet it is familiar to every English versifier. The few who wrote hexameters by ear glided naturally into it. Coleridge uses it once in his "Hymn to the Earth."[3] Landor, in some light verse of this type, has it once:

'Pon my | word, as I live, said a younger, I really believe he has done it.[4]

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1 "Vision of Judgement," preface.

2 Lectures "On translating Homer" (1861); popular edition (1896), p. 97, and cf. footnote to p. 151.

3 "Poems." "Thy | lap to the genial Heaven."

4 "Heroic Idylls," etc. (1863), No. 132 of Additional Poems, "On English Hexameters."

Frere, no mean authority, found it came naturally.[1] Among later writers "Owen Meredith" and Sir Lewis Morris have used it, and Bret Harte, in "Lost Tails of Miletus," actually begins a line with "Executed a," probably emphasizing the third syllable. The true canon seems to be: make your rhythm clear, and let syllables find their own place in relation to it. Time is the thing of essential importance. Ear and time carry Swinburne through such lines as these, which would be anathema to the painful Classicist:

A wall of turbid water, aslope to the wide sky's wonder.
Discoloured, opaque, suspended in sign as of strength without pity.
But the heart that impels them is even as a conqueror's insatiably craving.
The delight of the light she knows not, nor answers the sun or the stars.

Over these and many such obstacles his strong beat bears him victoriously, while our admiration attests the poet's success.

This point has been insisted on, because it is typical of the whole matter, and seems to sum up what can be said for and against both this and similar metres. If they are to be naturalized as English measures, they must be written as such, not in fancied obedience to rules of an alien prosody. If any cannot be so written, they are mere toys, which may or may not tickle scholastic fancy, but have no meaning for an English ear.

[1] Note at end of "Frogs," translated from Aristophanes (1830). See "Works" (Pickering, 1874), vol. iii., pp. 309-310.

The so-called "hexameter" is not in this latter class. Already, despite false ideals and hampering rules, our poets have used it with acceptance; its future cannot be foreseen. Matthew Arnold, in those "Lectures" already quoted, where poetic insight is more conspicuous than technical knowledge, predicted that our poets "will not always be content to forgo" the music of the hexameter.[1] The music of Greek hexameter they cannnot have, since they write not Greek verse but English; it remains for them to find a music of their own. A great poet is wanted, who will treat this metre as Milton treated that of "Paradise Lost," discovering its harmonies, revealing its potentialities. Prophecy is futile, but many signs point to a development on the lines indicated. Triple-time metre increases in favour; lines of six periods are exceedingly common. It looks as if this might become as usual a length in triple verse, as the five-period line in duple. That, however is guesswork. No great singer has yet handled this line in continuous repetition, as Swinburne has handled it in "elegiac" combination. Would that he had essayed the other task! Till some other do so, mere grammarians should leave it alone. They will but increase the mischief they have already done, in suggesting wrong conceptions, and cumbering an English line with misleading rules and analogies. English metre is made by poets, not by critics. When the work has been done, it may be competent for us to come in and consider results. Of

[1] As before, p. 78.

one thing, however, we may be sure. If this or any other measure is developed, it will be along the lines which it shares with more familiar forms. Laws which govern all English measures will apply to this also. Even the cursory examination now given seems to establish kinship with ordinary types, and to substantiate the main contention of this volume. Time-measure, rather than syllabic structure, is yet again here shown to be the basis of English verse.

THE END.

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